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Introducing New SOAR Tools: *How to Contact SSA and Guide to Collaborating with SSA & DDS*



PRESENTED BY:

SAMHSA SOAR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER
POLICY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

UNDER CONTRACT TO:

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Disclaimer

- This training is supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
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Learning Objectives

- Why collaborations with SSA and DDS are key to becoming a successful SOAR program (and how you can get there, too)
- What are the most effective strategies to build strong collaborations with SSA and DDS
- How to use these new tools to begin your conversations with SSA and DDS representatives

Agenda

History and Importance of Collaborations with SSA & DDS

- Kristin Lupfer, MSW, Project Director, SAMHSA SOAR TA Center, Policy Research Associates, Inc.

Introduction to New SSA and DDS Collaboration Tools

- Abigail Lemon, MA, Senior Project Associate, SAMHSA SOAR TA Center, Policy Research Associates, Inc.

State Strategies for Effective SSA and DDS Collaborations

- Korrie Snell, SOAR State Co-Lead, CABHI Coordinator, Behavioral Health Services Commission, KS Dept. for Aging & Disability Services, Topeka, KS
- Melissa (Missy) Bogart-Starkey, SOAR State Co-Lead, Behavioral Health Services Commission, KS Dept. for Aging & Disability Services, Topeka, KS
- Caroline Bolas, MSW, MS, SOAR State Lead, Behavioral Health Administration, Catonsville, MD

Questions & Answers

- Facilitated by SOAR TA Center Staff



History and Importance of Collaborations with SSA & DDS

KRISTIN LUPFER, MSW, PROJECT DIRECTOR, SAMHSA SOAR TA CENTER, POLICY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

History of Collaboration

- You might think that after 10 years, we'd have this collaboration thing already down pat...
- And there should be little that you need to do locally except tell SSA you are ready to start SOAR, right?
- Since SOAR started in 2005, SOAR TA Center staff have worked hard to develop relationships at SSA
- Our work over the years has resulted in collaborations with SOAR being encouraged by staff at SSA headquarters and regional and area SSA offices

Importance of Partnerships

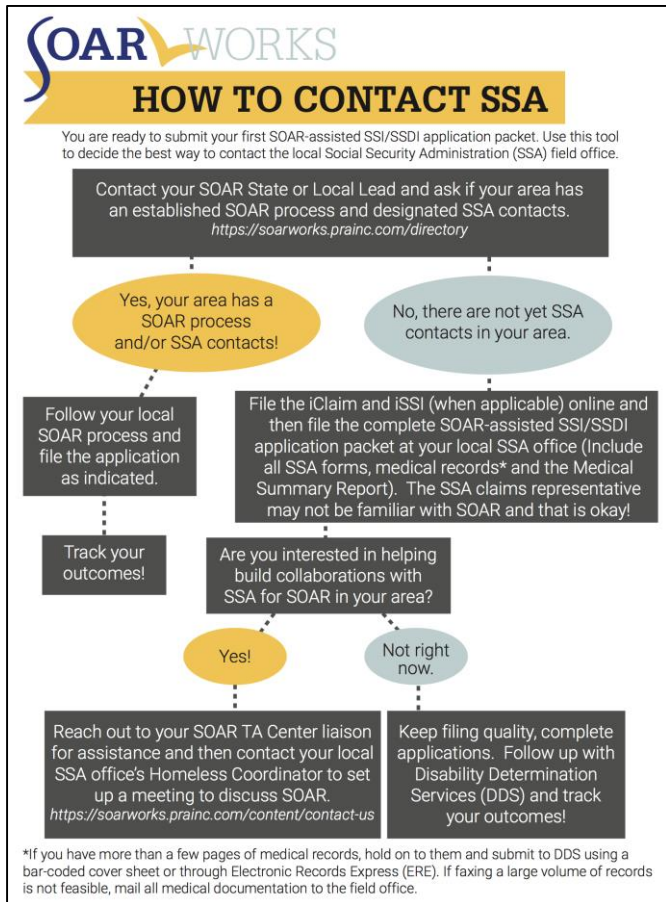
- SSA's administrative style encourages local field office autonomy (as long as the rules are followed, of course!)
- Actual on-the-ground collaboration with SOAR *only* happens with local field office buy-in
- Collaboration with SSA and DDS is *almost never* in writing
- And always requires careful and frequent communication, care and maintenance
- So a lot depends on YOU!



Introduction to the NEW SOAR Tools on SSA and DDS Collaborations!

ABIGAIL LEMON, MA, SENIOR PROJECT ASSOCIATE, SAMHSA SOAR
TA CENTER, POLICY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

New SSA & DDS Collaboration Tools!



SOAR WORKS **SAMHSA**
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov • 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)

Guide to Collaborating with the Social Security Administration and Disability Determination Services

Purpose of the Guide

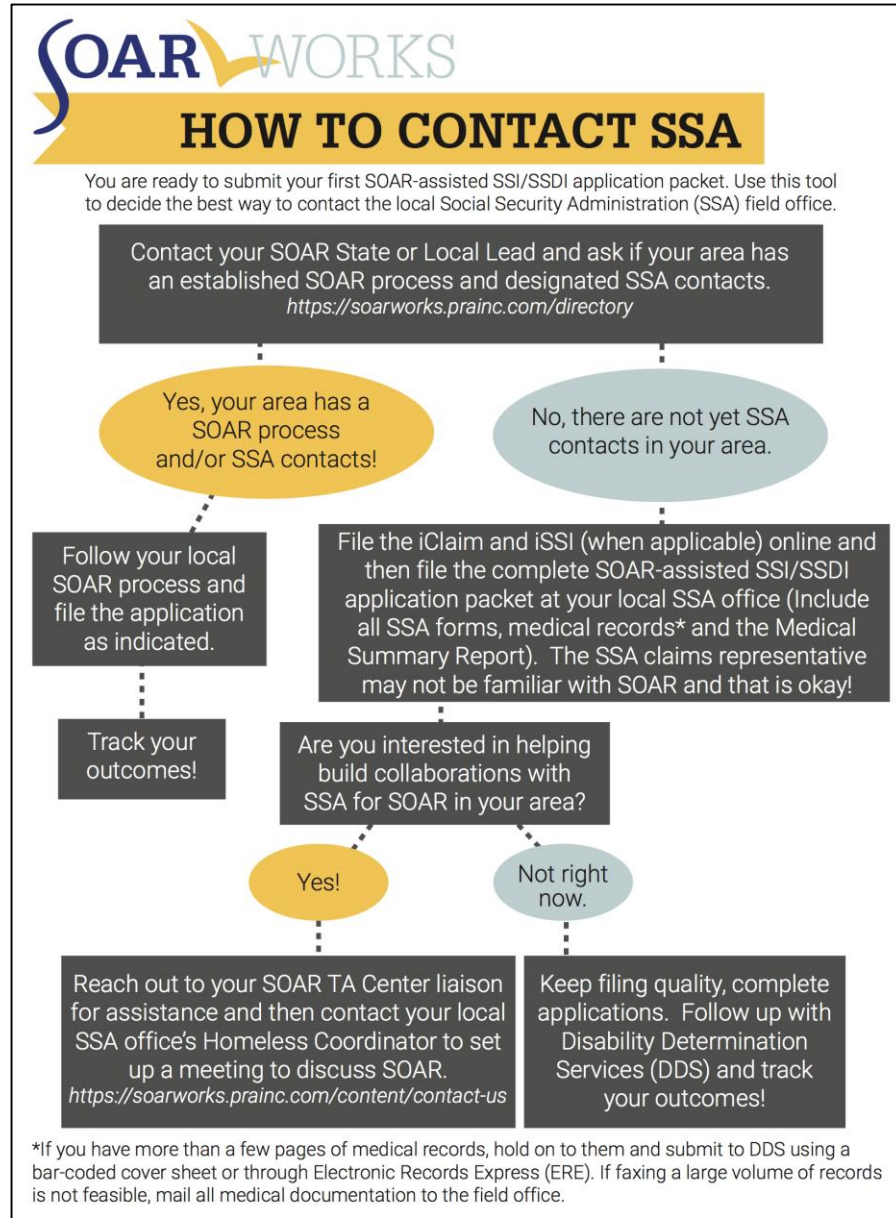
- Develop successful working relationships with the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS).
- Provide examples of how successful relationships benefit SOAR-trained case managers, SSA and DDS.

Strategies for Collaborating with the Social Security Administration

Strategy #1. Designated SSA Liaison -- Identify a liaison at the local SSA office to communicate with SOAR-trained case managers. The liaison is the main point of contact for checking current claim status, setting the applicant's protective filing date and troubleshooting any issues that may arise during the application process.

Benefits to SSA	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SOAR case manager serves as the applicant's representative SOAR case manager maintains regular communication with SSA liaison SSA has better communication with applicants experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness Claim may be processed more quickly because SSA will get immediate responses to requests for additional information SSA liaison will become experienced with SOAR and working with people who are homeless SSA liaison will build relationships with SOAR provider agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SSA liaison gives SOAR case managers a single contact for seamless receipt of the application SSA liaison becomes familiar with SOAR and SOAR case managers in the community SSA liaison can facilitate communication within SSA to resolve issues as they arise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boston, Massachusetts has identified a SOAR liaison at one of the area's many SSA offices (which includes Boston and the surrounding areas); SOAR-trained case managers submit all applications to one office where they are processed by the designated SOAR liaison. Pittsburgh, PA has multiple SSA offices that serve the city. The Local SOAR Lead works with an identified SOAR liaison at each SSA field office, who assists in processing SSI/SSDI applications for SOAR applicants

How to Contact SSA “Decision Tree”



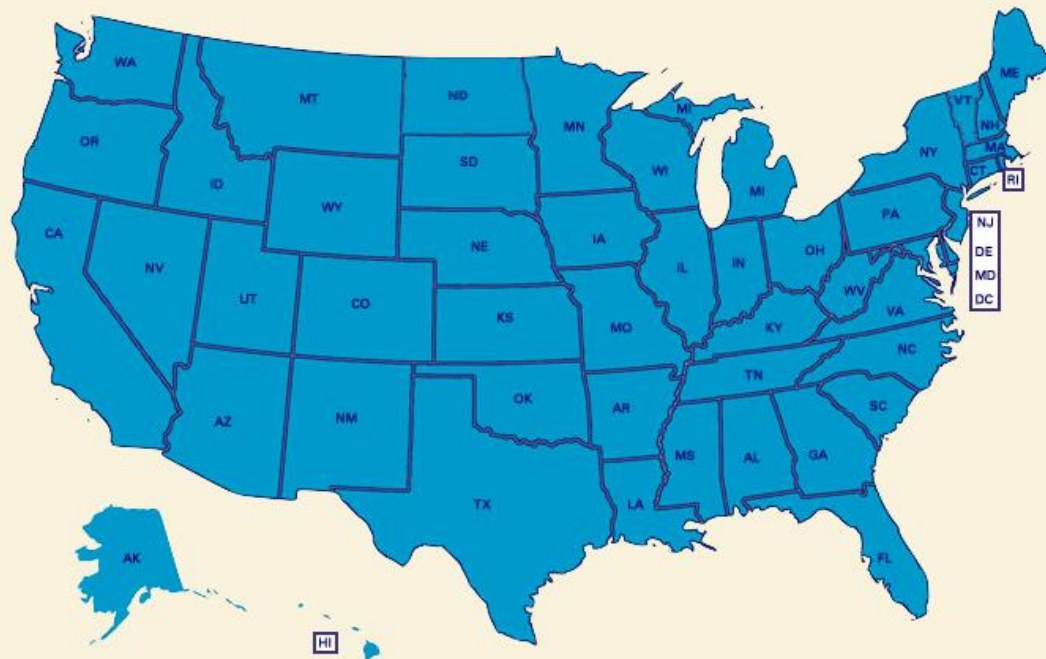
Contact your State or Local Lead and ask if your area has an established SOAR process and designated SSA contacts.

<https://soarworks.prainc.com/directory>

SOAR is available in all 50 states. Please use the map below to view information for your state.

Does your community deserve some time in the spotlight?

Fill out our [four-question community spotlight form](#) and send it to your TA Center liaison along with a picture of your team and we will feature your answers in a community spotlight blog post!



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Ask a Question

Kansas

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Description of Project

The SOAR effort in Kansas is an initiative designed to increase access to SSI/SSDI for eligible adults who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder.

Individuals interested in training are encouraged to reach out to the State Team Lead or SOAR TA Center Liaison using the contact information above for more information about SOAR.

Date: 11/25/15

To: All SOAR Case Workers

Regarding: SOAR Case Worker Certification

The SOAR State Lead working in partnership with the SOAR Statewide Steering Committee has developed a certification process for SOAR case workers. The certification criteria was developed by the SOAR Statewide Steering Committee, which includes representatives from Social Security Administration (SSA), Disability Determination Services (DDS), SOAR Local Leads, Veterans Administration, SAMHSA SOAR TA Center and the Kansas Department of Corrections.

Only certified SOAR case workers will be allowed to submit "SOAR" applications to Social Security Administration. Non-certified SOAR workers can continue to submit benefits applications to the Social Security Administration. The applications submitted by non-certified workers will follow the standard procedures used by SSA and DDS and will not be handled as SOAR applications.

The development of the Kansas SOAR certification process will lead to a more efficient tracking of active SOAR case workers. The list of certified SOAR case workers will be maintained by the SOAR State Lead with KDADS and will be distributed to the Social Security offices and Disability Determination Services on a regular basis. This will lead to SSA and DDS only processing SOAR applications that have been completed by trained SOAR case workers who follow the SOAR process, utilize the critical components and submit high quality applications

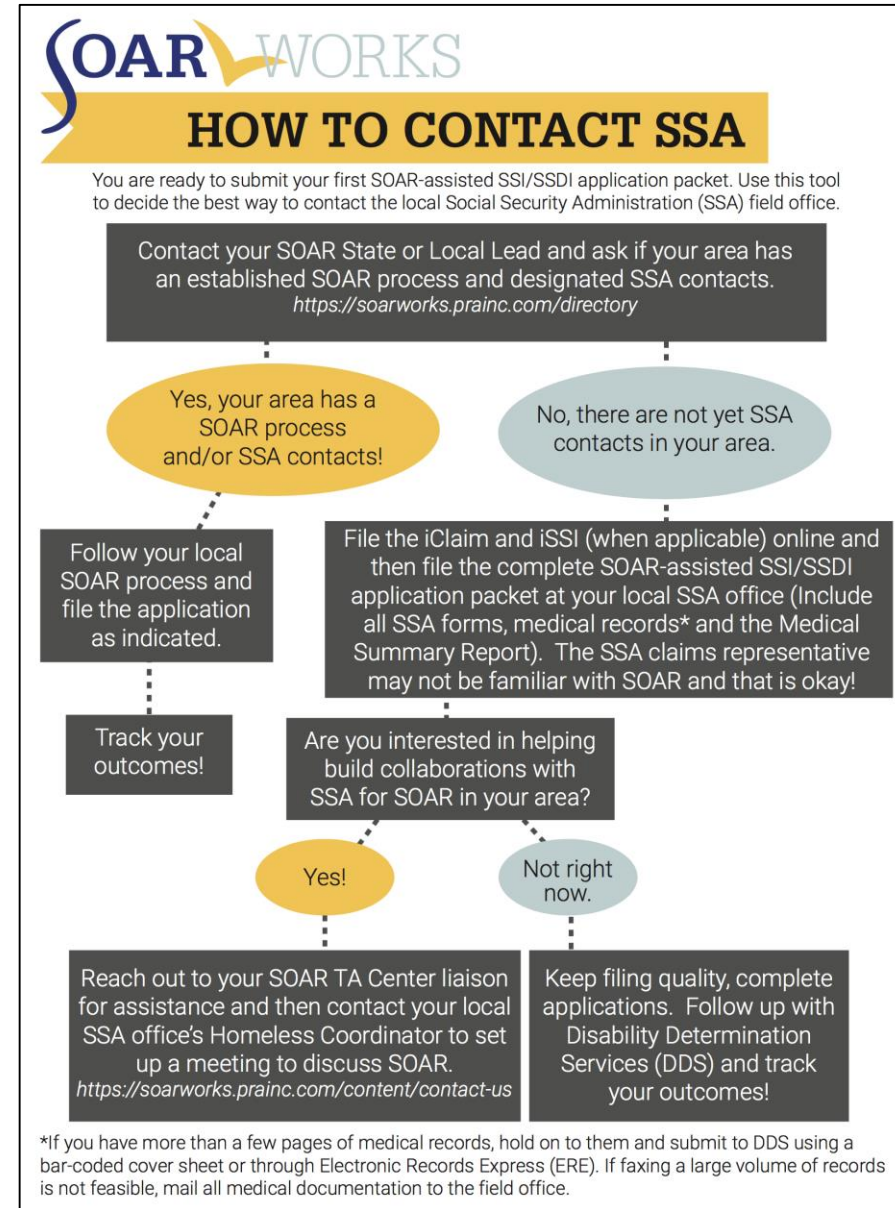
Certified SOAR case workers will enter their outcomes in the SOAR OAT system, the online database made available by the SAMHSA SOAR TA center, leading to more efficient tracking and reporting of SOAR outcomes.

The intent of the SOAR certification process is to sustain and strengthen the integrity of the SOAR program in Kansas and to sustain and strengthen the positive relationships between the SOAR case workers, Social Security offices and DDS.

Effective on January 15th, 2016, only applications submitted by certified SOAR case workers will be handled as SOAR applications by SSA and DDS.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
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How to Contact SSA “Decision Tree”



Guide to Collaborating with the Social Security Administration and Disability Determination Services

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Collaborating with SSA & DDS

Strategies for Collaborating with the Social Security Administration

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How it's done in Albany, NY!

Strategies for Collaborating with the Social Security Administration

Strategy #3. Flagging – SSA flags applications as “homeless” and adds a special handling flag with SOAR in the remarks to notify DDS that this should be a complete packet (including medical records and Medical Summary Report).

Benefits to SSA	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A SOAR application is flagged as “homeless” in the SSA field office and identified as a “SOAR” claim in the electronic remarks ▪ Indicates that the application is from a SOAR-trained case manager and SSA/DDS should expect a complete and well-documented claim ▪ Ensures access to a SOAR-trained case manager who will respond quickly if additional information is needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensures that applications are being processed in a timely manner ▪ Ensures communication with a specific SSA claims representative or DDS examiner regarding the claim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In Albany and Schenectady, New York, the head of the local SSA field offices provided training to their claims representatives to recognize a SOAR application through the electronic remarks sections and the materials submitted. Once identified, the claims representative immediately communicates with the provider regarding the claim and begins the evaluation process



How Kansas Grows Winning Collaborations!

KORRIE SNELL, SOAR STATE CO-LEAD, CABHI COORDINATOR, BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES COMMISSION, KS DEPT. FOR AGING & DISABILITY SERVICES, TOPEKA, KS

MELISSA (MISSY) BOGART-STARKEY, SOAR STATE CO-LEAD, BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES COMMISSION, KS DEPT. FOR AGING & DISABILITY SERVICES, TOPEKA, KS

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Other Key Strategies from Kansas

- Monthly steering committee meetings with SSA and DDS representatives
- Established SSA points of contact in all Kansas SSA field offices
- SSA and DDS have lists of all SOAR trained providers and will notify us if a claim is flagged as SOAR from a person who is not SOAR trained – helps maintain quality of applications
- Good communication between SOAR providers and SSA/DDS representatives brings:
 - Successful SOAR applications!
 - Even with denials, SOAR providers understand why denied and how to improve medical case development practices



SOAR and DDS: Addressing Problems Through Solutions Oriented Collaboration

CAROLINE BOLAS, MSW, MS, SOAR STATE LEAD, BEHAVIORAL
HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (BHA), CATONSVILLE, MD

Maryland's Collaboration with DDS

Problem:

- Due to high volume of work, SSA claims can be sent to other states for adjudication which can make communication more difficult and make it harder to develop effective relationships.

Solution:

- Maryland DDS nominated 10 DDS Examiners who process all of the SOAR claims.
- Once claim reaches DDS, it is triaged to one of the nominated SOAR DDS Examiners who immediately start working with the SOAR case manager.
- These DDS SOAR Dedicated Examiners have been extremely helpful to everyone!

Key Benefits of Collaboration with DDS

- The strong working relationships and partnerships which develop between case managers and the DDS examiners bring:
 - More SOAR allowances
 - Increased knowledge of SSA policies and procedures
 - Better understanding of how to medically document claim
- Allows for those DDS examiners to really see the benefits of the SOAR process:
 - Adjudicating many SOAR claims, not just 1 or 2 a year
 - See just how the SOAR process makes a positive difference to both their work and the applicants' lives

Collaboration with DDS: Medical Documentation

SOAR Critical Components:

- Identifying with the applicant and other involved parties where the person has received medical treatment
- Collecting medical records
- Submitting directly to DDS
- **Important for number of reasons:**
 - Speeds up the process – case manager starts collecting medical records straight away so they are available by the time they are ready to submit the application
 - All or most of the records are ready to be submitted as soon as DDS examiner is assigned.

Collecting Medical Records

- **Helps identify additional treating sources**
 - Often in a medical record it will refer to previous treatment, which the applicant may have forgotten about, so can then ask for these new records if necessary
- **Allows the case manager to write a comprehensive Medical Summary Report (MSR)**
 - Connect the dots: For example, the reason there is no treatment between x and y dates is not because the person didn't require it, but perhaps he or she was living on the streets and was unable to access health care at that time
- **Depending on the community, often applicants will be using the same clinics or medical providers**
 - Over time, SOAR case managers can establish relationships with the providers which means it is less likely that requests for medical records will be ignored.
 - They can also use the relationships developed in local work groups to help overcome any issues getting records. Perhaps person A knows the Director of that clinic well and can speak to them directly about the benefits of SOAR and ensure that records are provided promptly

DDS Perspective: SOAR Collecting Medical Records

By using the bar code, records go straight into applicant's electronic file

- DDS has all the medical documentation right away so they can make quicker and more accurate decisions
- Again, this can speed up adjudication of claim

Allows for much more comprehensive applications

- Lessens likely need for consultative examinations or technical denials

Allows for DDS to highlight if additional information is needed in any area

- Case manager can ensure that more evidence is obtained (e.g. Arranging an in house evaluation or undertaking additional assessments, etc.)

Sometimes a case manager may struggle obtaining particular records

- DDS may have better working relationship with provider, e.g.) state hospital, jail, prison
- DDS and case manager can see how best to go about obtaining that information – some times, especially if out of state, a medical provider might actually respond better to DDS

Consultative Examinations (CE)

- Through SOAR, whenever possible we hope to avoid the need for a CE
 - DDS will schedule these additional evaluations when they do not have sufficient evidence to make a determination
 - From a DDS perspective, CEs also are costly and time consuming, especially if an applicant misses one and it needs to be rescheduled
- Through using the MSR and collecting comprehensive medical records we try to avoid the need for CEs
 - By regular communication with DDS, we can identify what information may be missing and whether it can be obtained without the need for a CE
- The rates on CEs for SOAR were 30% compared to 57% for non-SOAR cases
 - With the addition of Nurse Practitioners as an acceptable medical source, we expect that number to lower still

Having DDS as a True Partner

- DDS trainings on Sequential Evaluation, Listings and DAA materiality
- DDS representative speaks at our annual Maryland SOAR Conference
- DDS has a list of all SOAR trained providers and will notify us if a claim is flagged as “SOAR” from a person is not SOAR trained – helps maintain quality of applications
- DDS will contact STL if there is an issue with a provider, e.g. not returning phone calls or not submitting quality applications so that we can trouble shoot solutions
- DDS examiners talk directly to case managers, but if experiencing issues with how SOAR process is working, our local leads will then talk with DDS liaison, so she doesn’t have to deal with hundreds of phone calls!
- Communication is key!

Questions and Answers

Facilitated By:

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Policy Research Associates, Inc.

- Please type your question into the Q&A panel located underneath the participant tab, or
- To ask a question by phone, please raise your hand by clicking the hand icon in the participant pod. We will unmute you so you can ask your question.

For More Information on SOAR

<http://soarworks.prainc.com>

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