

History of SOAR

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) is an approach that helps states increase access to mainstream benefits for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness through strategic planning, training and technical assistance.

Background

SOAR has its roots in a Social Security Administration (SSA) funded demonstration project that started in Baltimore in 1993 and still continues today. Originally directed by psychiatric social worker Yvonne Perret, her team developed tools and strategies for assisting people with mental illness who were experiencing homelessness to apply for SSA disability programs. Beginning in 2001, with the support of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Ms. Perret and Deborah Dennis with Policy Research Associates, Inc. (PRA) developed SAMHSA's *Stepping Stones to Recovery* manual and training curriculum. In 2014, PRA further developed this curriculum into the SOAR Online Course, currently used to train SOAR practitioners around the country.

In 2005, with funding provided by the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD), states participating in the Federal Interagency Policy Academies on Homelessness were invited to apply for SOAR technical assistance and the first 14 states were selected. In the following 2 years, 20 additional states applied and were selected to receive technical assistance that included infrastructure and systems change planning, train-the-trainer programs, on-site training and ongoing technical assistance.

SAMHSA SOAR TA Center

In September 2009, SAMHSA awarded a five-year contract for the SOAR Technical Assistance (TA) Center to PRA, which was renewed in 2014. Today, the SOAR TA team works with all 50 states to develop and refine action plans for implementing and expanding SOAR programs in communities across the country. In-person technical assistance, regional and state calls, webinars, a monthly newsletter, an interactive website, online course and online outcome tracking program bring together SOAR stakeholders and practitioners to share successes, challenges and ideas for development, expansion and change.

Costs

There is no cost for any technical assistance or training provided under the auspices of the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center. In addition:

- The expectation is that providers involved with SOAR do not charge persons applying for SSA disability benefits for their services. We work closely with providers to identify alternative sources of funding for their programs.
- The SOAR Online Course is available free of charge to participants. Community SOAR Leads may offer SOAR Online Course Review Sessions to individuals who have completed the SOAR Online Course. Materials for these trainings are available at no cost from the SOAR TA Center.
- SAMHSA provides funding for each state to send two people per year to a SOAR Leadership Academy, which supports local SOAR leaders in building and sustaining SOAR initiatives in their communities. Additional participants are accepted based on available space, but must cover their own travel expenses; there is no registration fee.
- Some states or localities have contracted with PRA or other national SOAR experts for additional training or technical assistance beyond what is available from SAMHSA's SOAR TA Center.