

SOAR and Coordinated Entry

As mandated by the HEARTH Act, communities funded by HUD's Continuum of Care (CoC) program are planning and implementing coordinated entry systems. As these systems are implemented, it is important to identify individuals who are unable to sustain work at a substantial gainful level and may be eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Incorporating disability related questions into a community's coordinated entry system can assist in identifying potential SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) applicants.

Coordinated Entry Systems

HUD requires all CoCs to establish and operate a coordinated or centralized assessment system¹ to increase the efficiency of their local crisis response systems, ensuring easy and fair access to resources for individuals experiencing homelessness. A critical aspect of coordinated entry systems is assessing an individual or family's need for housing and supportive services and providing quick connections to housing and service providers.

Many communities are incorporating basic SSI/SSDI eligibility questions into their coordinated entry assessments, so that individuals without adequate income who may qualify for Social Security disability benefits receive immediate referrals to local SOAR providers and employment services, as appropriate. These assessments for income support needs are done concurrently with housing-related needs assessments, such that individuals experiencing homelessness are rapidly placed into housing and referred to appropriate supportive services as needed and desired.

Common Assessment Tools

Common Assessment tools are a required element of Coordinated Entry. Already being used in many coordinated entry systems and CoCs, Common Assessment Tools quickly assess the health and social needs of individuals experiencing homelessness so they can be matched with appropriate housing resources.

Below are indicators from Common Assessment Tools that may help identify potential eligibility for SSA disability benefits and appropriate SOAR referral:

- Past hospitalization against the person's will and/or current mental health treatment
- Self-report of multiple physical health conditions or observations of serious health conditions
- Tri-morbidity (co-occurring mental and substance use disorder with a chronic medical condition)
- Observations of poor hygiene or living skills
- History of serious brain injury or head trauma
- Difficulty in concentrating and remembering things
- Self-reported disability or diagnoses information

Common Assessment Tools are only one "tool in the toolbox" as part of a community's overall housing prioritization strategy. However, using the Common Assessment to prioritize SOAR assistance, we recommend prioritizing those who report serious medical or mental health conditions and rank highest on the housing prioritization list.

¹ <https://www.hudexchange.info/news/hud-publishes-coordinated-entry-requirements-and-checklist-of-essential-elements/>

Recommended Questions to Include with Common Assessment Tools

1. Have you ever received a monthly check for Social Security disability or SSI? If so, are you still receiving checks? If not, when did they stop?
2. Tell us about any mental or physical health problems that make it difficult for you to work. Have you been able to earn SGA?²
3. Do you have difficulties in any of the following areas?
 - Understand, remember or apply information (ability to learn, understand instructions, provide explanation, problem solve, use reason and judgment in work-related decisions)
 - Interact with others (ability to relate to and work with supervisors, co-workers and the public)
 - Concentrate, persist or maintain pace (ability to maintain focus, complete tasks, attend appointments, remain on task at a sustained pace)
 - Adapt or manage oneself (regulate emotions, control behavior, maintain well-being in the work setting, respond to demands, adapt to changes)
 - Physical activities (walking, standing, sitting, lifting, etc.)
4. Have you received any treatment for these conditions in the past (in the past year)? If so, where?
5. Are you already working with someone to apply for benefits? Do you want to speak to someone about applying for benefits?
6. Are you interested in talking with someone about employment supports?

² Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) is defined by SSA as the ability to earn a set amount of money per month. SSA sets the amount annually. See <https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/content/ssa-annual-updates>.