

## Best Practices for Collaborating with SSA and DDS on SSI Outreach to People Experiencing Homelessness

SOAR seeks to increase access to Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. To achieve this goal, collaborations with SSA and the Disability Determination Services (DDS) are absolutely essential. SOAR can provide invaluable assistance to both SSA and DDS and, similarly, SSA and DDS can help to streamline the process for SOAR providers and for the applicants they both serve.

### SOAR Addresses Challenges

The SOAR model is designed to help address many of the challenges that SSA and DDS face when serving people who are experiencing homelessness. SOAR providers:

- Maintain ongoing communication with the applicant and advise SSA of changes in living arrangement, employment, income, etc.
- Provide transportation and accompany applicants to appointments.
- Serve as the applicant's appointed representative using the SSA-1696.
- Complete the Online Disability Benefits Application.
- Provide complete documentation, signed paperwork, medical records, and a detailed medical summary report.
- Provide timely follow-up to SSA and DDS's requests for additional information.

All of this will help shorten application processing time by providing complete information and avoiding consultative examinations. Focusing on the submission of a complete and high-quality initial application avoids re-applications and appeals, which put additional burdens on the system.

### SSA Collaborative Efforts

SSA regional, area and field offices have helped support SOAR projects by:

- Attending state and local steering meetings, SOAR trainings and ongoing provider meetings.
- Establishing statewide or local SOAR processes that help streamline communication and processing.

The SOAR Process<sup>1</sup> is a set of formalized and customized procedures outlining how SOAR providers will submit disability applications to SSA and DDS in their community. The process is developed so that SOAR providers

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<sup>1</sup> [Standard SOAR Process for Completing SSI/SSDI Applications](#)

know who to contact and how. It helps all parties to know what to expect so that when a part of the process breaks down, it can be addressed. The SOAR Process generally includes:

- Dedicated liaisons at local SSA field offices.
- Use of the 60 days to file to prepare and submit a complete application packet.
- Electronic submission of all available forms and documentation.
- Electronic flagging of “homeless” applications and adding “SOAR” to remarks prior to transfer to DDS.

## **DDS Collaborative Efforts**

Close communication and collaboration with state DDS offices are essential for the efficient and effective processing of SOAR applications. SOAR programs and DDS offices across the country have developed a number of different ways to collaborate:

- Ongoing communication between the Medical or Professional Relations Officer and SOAR steering committees to plan for improved processing of claims from homeless applicants.
- DDS liaisons attend SOAR trainings when possible.
- SOAR applications that are flagged in the SSA field office receive expedited handling and are either immediately assigned to an examiner or are routed to a designated unit or set of examiners for processing.
- SOAR providers work closely with the DDS examiner to identify and obtain additional records and reports from treatment sources.
- SOAR providers spend additional time interviewing applicants and helping them recollect treating sources; they can also follow-up with initially unresponsive medical providers and immediately send medical records they receive to DDS.
- Because the SOAR provider provides complete medical records and detailed functional information there is a decreased need for Consultative Examinations, saving processing time and money.
- When SOAR providers provide complete and clear applications, DDS examiners are able to make more accurate and better documented decisions than otherwise possible.