



# Integrating SOAR with VA Programs: Success from the Field

JUNE 1, 2017

Jen Elder, M.Sc., National Policy and Partnerships Coordinator, SAMHSA SOAR TA Center  
Lauren Waldt, Disability Assistance Outreach Specialist, Health Care for the Homeless, Baltimore, MD  
Brandan Pippens, LCSW-C, CRRC Outreach Social Worker, Baltimore VA Medical Center, MD  
Sam Strike, Legal & Benefits Specialist - Veterans First, Friendship Place, Washington, D.C.



## Disclaimer

The views, opinions, and content expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).





## SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access & Recovery

- Focuses on people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- A model for assisting individuals to apply for Social Security disability benefits
- Sponsored by the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in collaboration with SSA since 2005
- SOAR is active in all 50 states; no direct funding is provided to states



## Changing Lives Since 2005

- **31,356** persons experiencing or at risk for homelessness have been approved on initial application
- **67%** approval rate overall, in an average of **101** days in 2016
  - Compares to 10-15 percent for unassisted applications from people who are homeless and 28 percent for all applicants
  - Top 10 states have served over 9,400 individuals, average 84% approval
- Appeals can take a year or more; many people give up and do not appeal





## Importance of SSI/SSDI for Veterans

- SSA disability benefits can provide access to:
  - Income – Veterans can receive SSI/SSDI in conjunction with, or as an alternative to, VA disability benefits and employment
  - Health insurance – Veterans can use the Medicaid and Medicare health benefits that comes with SSI/SSDI to supplement VA health services
- SSA Benefits + Employment + VA Benefits = Income Stability
- Goal is to find the *right combination of income supports* for each Veteran to obtain and maintain housing stability



## SSA Definition of Disability

- The definition of disability and application process is different for VA and SSA benefits
- For SSI/SSDI, the Veteran needs to show:
  - Evidence of a physical or mental health condition, which results in functional impairments that limits his/her ability to work at a substantial gainful level (quantified as \$1170/month in 2017)
  - That the disabling condition has lasted, or is expected to last, for 12 months or end in death
- **Why is the applicant unable to work and earn \$1170/month?**



## SSA Fast Track Programs

---

### 100% Permanent and Total Veterans Initiative

- Expedites SSI/SSDI applications from Veterans who have 100% P&T rating from the VA
- Does not guarantee SSI/SSDI approval

### Wounded Warriors

- Veterans who received disabling mental or physical health injuries while on active duty on or after October 1, 2001
- The injury does not need to have occurred during combat operations



## Resources

---

- **SOAR Technical Assistance Center:** <https://soarworks.prainc.com/> - issue briefs and guides in the SOAR Library. Connect with SOAR in your state!
- **SOAR Works to End Veteran Homelessness: VA Caseworker's Guide:** [https://www.va.gov/homeless/docs/VA\\_SOAR\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.va.gov/homeless/docs/VA_SOAR_Guide.pdf)
- **SOAR and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF):** <https://www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf/index.asp> - numerous resources under Supportive Services, "Connection to Mainstream Resources"
- **Social Security Administration:** <http://www.ssa.gov/people/veterans/>





# SOAR in HUD-VASH and Veteran Treatment Courts

Lauren Waldt, Disability Assistance Outreach Specialist  
Health Care for the Homeless, Baltimore, MD



## SOAR & HUD-VASH

### HUD-VASH Eligibility:

1. Must be a Veteran eligible for services from the Department of Veterans Affairs.
2. Must meet the definition for homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless.

### HUD-VASH Services:

- ❖ HUD-VASH is a case management program
- ❖ HUD provides a Section 8 (all tenant-based in Maryland at this time) voucher, VA provides case management services
- ❖ Case management is Veteran driven, and goals are set by Veteran in their service plan
- ❖ Case management takes places in the office, home, and community settings



## Baltimore's Veteran Treatment Docket

---

- ❖ Started as docket instead of court
- ❖ Championed by Judge Halee Weinstein in Baltimore City
  - Inspired by Homeless Docket
  - Reached out to United Way, HPRP, and prosecutor's office
  - Planning started in December 2014
- ❖ Brought in other service providers based pre-existing relationships, including VA & HCH
- ❖ First docket occurred in October 2015



## Veteran Treatment Docket

---

- ❖ 3 Tracks for Veterans:
  1. 90-Day Diversion
  2. Track 2: Plead Guilty but plea removed if program requirements completed
  3. Track 3: Plead Guilty but after completing program requirements, receive Probation Before Judgement (PBJ)



## Veteran Treatment Docket

---

### ❖ Other Takeaways:

- Judge as strong advocate
- Funding from Maryland Judiciary Office of Problem Solving Courts
- Program Coordinator and Mentor Coordinator are KEY!
- 1 Probation Office for Court
- Collaboration between State's Attorney's & Public Defender's Office



## VA Community Resource and Referral Center

---

Brandan Pippens, LCSW-C, CRRC Outreach Social Worker  
Baltimore VA Medical Center, Baltimore, MD



## The VA's Mission

---

- To make sure that every Veteran has permanent, sustainable housing with access to high-quality health care and other supportive services.
- To prevent future homelessness for Veterans whenever possible, or if unavoidable, to ensure that homelessness is otherwise rare, brief, and nonrecurring.



## Role of VA Outreach Social Worker

---

- Engagement
- Assessment
- Treatment Planning
- Referral to Service Providers
- Resource Usage
- Advocacy
- Crisis Intervention
- Education
- Coordination of Non VA services





## The VA and Community Outreach efforts

- Across the country, VA Homeless service providers, specifically, VA Homeless Outreach Social Workers attend monthly and bi-monthly meetings with the Continuum of Care (COC) groups for each county in the state.
- Through sufficient coordination, each COC's goal is to be able to identify all homeless Veterans by name and share a list of those names across systems. We can then use this data to effectively provide quality service to these Veterans that have been identified.
- Most homeless service providers utilize the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) software to track their clients, as well the homeless service providers in that region.



## The VA and Community Outreach efforts

- It is our obligation to document each Veteran we encounter on the street into our HOMES (Homeless Operation Management and Evaluation System) to ensure efficient tracking and data collection.
- Currently here at the Baltimore VA we are effectively working with the COCs to ensure that we as outreach social workers are granted access to the HMIS program.
- The SOAR program has played a role in granting benefits for our homeless Veterans. With continued awareness our VA Homeless Outreach Workers will continue to refer eligible Veterans to the SOAR program.



## Community Collaborations are Key

---

- With the VA's continued and increased involvement with the COC group meetings across the country, ending Veteran homelessness can be a reality.
- By having these community partnerships we can :
  - Identify all Veterans experiencing homelessness.
  - We are able to provide shelter immediately to any Veteran experiencing unsheltered homelessness who want housing.
  - Provide service-intensive transitional housing in limited instances.
  - Have the capacity and resources to help Veterans swiftly move into permanent housing.
  - Have a standard system in place should any Veteran become homeless or be at risk of homelessness in the future.



## Key to Continued Success

---

We have seen a steady decline of ending Veteran homelessness due to the continued leadership, collaboration, commitment and a sense of urgency from communities across the country. *No one entity can end homelessness among Veterans.*

# SSVF and SOAR



## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

SAM STRIKE  
NCHV 2017



## Dovetailing Program Goals

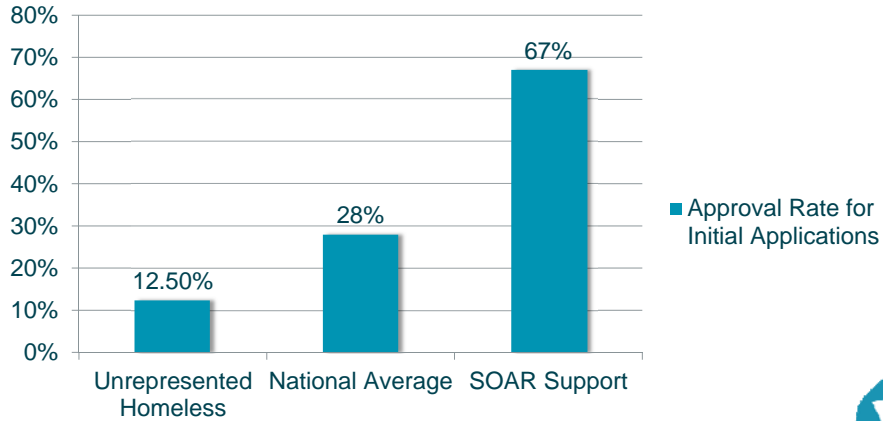


- Functional Zero needs Quick Turnaround
  - SOAR
    - ✦ Streamlined services means faster decisions
    - ✦ Average of 101 days to decision (2016)
  - SSVF
    - ✦ 90 day rapid re-housing program
    - ✦ Average time in program: 109 days (FY2015)



## Advantages of SOAR

Approval Rate for Initial Applications



## Advantages of SOAR



Communication with SSA and DDS



Knowing exactly where to send things



Allows for solving extraneous problems



## Challenges

- Applications get caught up
  - Average of 101 days means that there are some applications that take significantly longer
- SSA is understaffed and overworked
  - More than 2 million applications each year
  - Staff resources have not kept pace
- More work for us
  - Unless you're already doing applications, then it makes your life easier!



## Interaction with VA Benefits

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic Income for those without working quarters</li> <li>• \$735</li> </ul>
Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unaffected by VA Benefits</li> <li>• Average \$1,171</li> </ul>
Non-Service-Connected "Wartime" Pension*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unearned Needs-Based Income (reduces SSI)</li> <li>• \$1,076</li> </ul>
Service-Connected Disability Compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unrelated to other income – can also get SSDI</li> <li>• \$133.57 - \$2,915.55</li> </ul>



# Q&A

---



## Contact Us

---

Jen Elder  
jelder@prainc.com

Brandan Pippens  
Brandan.Pippens@va.gov

Lauren Waldt  
lwaldt@hchmd.org

Sam Strike  
sstrike@friendshipplace.org

<https://soarworks.prainc.com>

