WEBINAR: Using Social Security Disability Benefits to Increase Income and Housing Stability for Veterans

WEDNESDAY
JUNE 24, 2015
Logistics

- **Asking questions during the webinar**
  - All participant phone lines are muted
  - You’ll be unable to ask questions by phone
  - Please type your question in the on-screen chat box
  - There will be two opportunities during the webinar to ask questions

- **Post webinar survey**
  - Survey from Cindy Borden, Assistant Director TA and Training (NCHV)
Asking Questions During the Training

- Submit questions in the chat box on the webinar
- E-mail questions to Cindy Borden at cborden@nchv.org
- Submit questions through the post-training survey
Using Social Security Disability Benefits to Increase Income and Housing Stability for Veterans

Presented for:
National Veterans Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC) and Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP) grantees
June 2015
SOAR Technical Assistance Initiative

- SOAR – SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access & Recovery
- Focuses on people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- SOAR is 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
- SOAR TA Center helps states and communities by providing technical assistance and training
22,810 persons experiencing or at risk for homelessness have been approved on initial application.

65% approval rate overall, in an average of 94 days in 2014.

- Top 10 SOAR states have average approval rate of 82%.

Compared to 10-15% for unassisted applications from people who are homeless and 29% for all applicants.

Appeals can take a year or more; many people give up and do not appeal.
What is the need?

- The January 2014 point-in-time count identified almost 50,000 homeless Veterans
  - SOAR can also serve those who are at-risk for homelessness, or who recently entered permanent housing without income
- Half of Veterans experiencing homelessness have severe mental illness and over half have other health issues
- High prevalence of traumatic brain injury (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and sexual trauma among homeless Veterans contributes to difficulty in maintaining employment and housing
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
  - **Health insurance** – Veterans can use the Medicaid and Medicare health benefits that comes with SSI/SSDI to supplement VA health services

- For Veterans with disabilities, SSI/SSDI can increase income & housing stability, and reduce their future risk of homelessness

- Veterans can work while applying for SSA benefits and after receiving them

- For details on SSA work incentives, see issue brief: *SOAR and Employment for SSI/SSDI Beneficiaries*
Definition of Disability

- The definition of disability and application process is different for VA and SSA benefits
  - Discharge status is not a factor in SSI/SSDI determination
  - Disabling condition does not need to be related to military service
  - Those denied for VA benefits may still be eligible for SSI/SSDI
  - Veterans can access SSA benefits while they are waiting for VA benefits
  - There is no partial disability with Social Security
SSA Definition of Disability

- 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 $1090/month in 2015)
  - 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?
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
Justice-Involved Veterans

BEST PRACTICES FROM THE SOAR TA CENTER
Myth Buster

Justice Involved Persons can apply for benefits!

✅ With active warrants

✅ While currently incarcerated (minimum of 30 days prior to release)

✅ On probation or parole
What Happens to Benefits for Justice Involved Persons?

- Social Security Administration (SSA) regulates the receipt of disability benefits while a person is incarcerated in a penal institution.

- The rules are different for both SSI and SSDI beneficiaries.
For SSI

- Incarcerated for a full calendar month, benefits are suspended.
- Released in less than 12 calendar month, benefits can be reinstated upon release.
- If an SSI recipient is incarcerated for 12 consecutive calendar months their SSI benefits are terminated and they must reapply.
- Reaplication can be made 30 days prior to their expected release date but benefits cannot begin until release.
For SSDI

- Recipients are eligible to continue receiving their benefits until they are *convicted* of a criminal offense *and* confined to a penal institution for more than 30 continuous days. After that time, their benefits are suspended.

- Benefits are reinstated the month following their release into the community.
Opportunities for SOAR and Justice-Involved Veterans

- Veterans Courts
- Re-entry Programs
- Stand Down Events
What’s Next?

USING SOAR IN YOUR COMMUNITY
Incorporate SOAR into Your Services

✓ Gather more information:
  - Issue Brief: *Connecting Veterans to Social Security Disability Benefits: A Key Component in Ending Veteran Homelessness*
  - Reach out to the SOAR TA Center with questions and to help you plan how to use SOAR

✓ Explore options for SOAR training with your staff
  - Free online SOAR training, available at: [http://soarworks.prainc.com](http://soarworks.prainc.com)

✓ Collaborate with community partners to refer Veterans to local SOAR initiatives
Contact information

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