Using SOAR to Connect Veterans to Social Security Benefits

April 21, 2016

Jen Elder, MSc
National Policy and Partnerships Coordinator
Policy Research Associates, Inc

Cindy Borden
Assistant Director,
TA and Training
NCHV
Logistics

- Asking questions during the webinar:
  - All participant phone lines are muted.
  - You will be unable to ask questions by phone.
  - Submit questions through the on screen chat box.

- Post webinar survey after the webinar and in a follow up email
Using SOAR to Connect Veterans to Social Security Benefits
SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery Technical Assistance Initiative

Sponsored By:
Substance Abuse And Mental Health Services Administration
U.S. Department Of Health And Human Services

APRIL 2016
Overview of Agenda

- What is SOAR?
- SOAR Outcomes
- Social Security Definition Of Disability
- Employment and Social Security benefits
- Call to Action
SOAR Technical Assistance Initiative

- SOAR – 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

- 27,226 persons experiencing or at risk for homelessness have been approved on initial application

- 65% approval rate overall, in an average of 81 days in 2015
  - Compares to 10-15 percent for unassisted applications from people who are homeless and 28 percent for all applicants

- Appeals can take a year or more; many people give up and do not appeal

- Estimate that in 2015 alone, SSI/SSDI for the individuals served by SOAR brought nearly $275 million into the economies of participating states and localities.
Top Ten States

- Served approximately 8,900 applicants
- 84 percent approval rate on initial applications
- Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Maryland, North Carolina, Arkansas, Kansas, Rhode Island, Alabama, Oregon, and Nevada.
- Approval rates are highest in places where more SOAR critical components are implemented
SSI & SSDI: The Basics

- SSA: Social Security Administration
- SSI: Supplemental Security Income; needs based; federal benefit rate is $733 per month in 2016; provides Medicaid in most states
- SSDI: Social Security Disability Insurance; amount depends on earnings put into SSA system; Medicare generally provided after 2 years of eligibility
- The disability determination process for both programs is the same
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 come 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**
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 $1130/month in 2016)
  - 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 $1130/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
Common Myths

- If you work, your SSI/SSDI application will be automatically denied
- Benefits and health insurance end immediately when start working
- You can only work part-time while receiving disability
- If Social Security knows you are working, they will say you aren’t disabled anymore

*Luckily for the Veterans we serve, these myths are false!*
While applying for SSI/SSDI

You can work during the application process

SSA looks at the type and amount of work
- Earn up to $1,130/month (2016)

**Strategy:** Encourage work from the start

- Can help to strengthen the application
- Might find that supported employment works better for individual
After approval for SSI/SSDI

You can work while receiving SSI/SSDI

Strategy: Connect with work support programs

- HVRP supportive employment services
- SSA’s Ticket to Work: www.chooseworkttw.net

Strategy: Utilize SSA work incentives

- SOAR Resources on employment and SSA work incentives in the Library at: https://soarworks.prainc.com
Expeditied Reinstatement of Benefits (EXR)

- For both SSI and SSDI
- Five years after benefits cease due to earnings
- Expedited return to payments and medical benefits
- A medical review is done to see if the current condition is the same as, or related to, the original condition
- Applicants can receive six months of provisional SSA benefits while the decision is processed
- Applicants should request EXR from the local SSA office
SOAR and HVRP Strategies

1. Educate Veterans that they can work and receive SSA disability benefits - be a myth buster!

2. Utilize Social Security work incentives and SSA’s Ticket to Work program

3. Celebrate successful examples of Veterans who work while receiving SSA disability benefits

*Through these strategies we can increase income and housing stability and end homelessness!*
Incorporate SOAR into Your Services

✓ Gather more information:
  ▪ Issue Brief: *Connecting Veterans to Social Security Disability Benefits: A Key Component in Ending Veteran Homelessness*
  ▪ Tip Sheet: *SOAR and HVRP*
  ▪ 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 Us

Jen Elder, MSc
National Policy and Partnerships Coordinator
jelder@prainc.com
518-439-7415 x 5256

http://soarworks.prainc.com
www.facebook.com/soarworks
@SOARWorks