Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs’ SOAR and Homeless Programs

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Outline

- Introduction to Veteran SOAR and Homeless Program
- Benefits of SOAR
- How the MDVA Veteran SOAR Program works
- Identifying and pursuing creative funding options
- Utilizing established community partnerships and by name list to strengthen SOAR outcomes
Introduction: MDVA’s Mission

- Preventing and ending Veteran homelessness in Minnesota
- Our approach
  - Veteran SOAR Program
  - Homeless Veterans Registry
Introduction: Veteran SOAR

- Pilot program designed to help MN Veterans who are homeless or at-risk and have a disability apply for Social Security Disability benefits
- Launched new 3-year pilot on March 31, 2016
- Innovative approach on existing, proven SOAR model administered throughout the country by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
Introduction: Homeless Programs

- Created and maintains a Homeless Veterans Registry (by name list)

- Prior to the Registry
  - Homeless Veterans were being identified by multiple agencies leading to an inability to accurately identify inflow
  - There wasn’t a good way to track our success rate – at a community level
  - Unknown amount of overlap between Veteran being served at multiple providers
Introduction: Homeless Programs

The Registry provided the first way for us to understand just how many Veterans we were identifying and how many Veterans we were housing.
Benefits of SOAR: Veteran SOAR Program

- SSI/SSDI application process can be long and complicated
- Trained and experienced SOAR Advocates help Veterans navigate the application process
  - Forms
  - Dates and deadlines
Benefits of SOAR: The Benefits of SSI/SSDI

- **Sustained income:** Veterans can receive Social Security Disability in conjunction with—or as an alternative to—VA disability benefits

- **Health insurance:** Veterans can use the Medicaid and Medicare health benefits that come with SSI/SSDI to supplement VA health services
Benefits of SOAR: Veteran Example #1

Veteran from northern Minnesota
- Receiving assistance through another agency program
- Identified as a potential candidate for SOAR
- MDVA reached out and connected with Veteran
- Met with Veteran in their hospital room and assisted him in completing his SSDI application
- Awarded SSDI benefits 46 days after date of application
- Stabilized his family’s uncertain housing situation
Benefits of SOAR: Veteran Example #2

Veteran from central Minnesota

- Suffered catastrophic snowmobile accident
- Identified as a potential candidate for SOAR
- MDVA reached out and connected with Veteran’s spouse
- Met with Veteran and spouse in his hospital room and assisted him in completing his SSDI application
- Awarded SSDI benefits 41 days after date of application
- Secured sustained monthly income for Veteran and family
Benefits of SOAR:
Benefits to the states

- Reduced reliability on state funded assistance
- Economic impact in state and local communities
Veteran SOAR: 2017 Outcomes

Counties with MDVA SOAR Applications (Blue)
Veteran SOAR: 2017 Outcomes

Counties with MDVA SOAR Approvals to Date (Blue)

2016

2017
Veteran SOAR: 2017 Outcomes

SOAR Initial Applications (FY17)

Approval Rate

- MDVA Veteran SOAR: 83%
- Minnesota SOAR: 53%
- SOAR Nationally: 64%
- SSA Nationally: 29%
Veteran SOAR: 2017 Outcomes

Average Number of Days to Initial Decision (FY17)

Number of Days to a Decision (Avg)

- MDVA Veteran SOAR: 81
- Minnesota SOAR: 141
- SOAR Nationally: 96
- SSA Nationally: 365
Benefits of SOAR: What separates us?

- Commitment to full-time staff pilot
- Effective screening process
- Providing Additional Assistance
- Established partnerships
- Sustainability through creative funding
Pilot Implementation:
Getting Started

- Identified a problem within our Homeless Veteran Population (sustainability) and a solution (receipt of SSI/SSDI)
- Contacted MN Department of Human Services (operates the SOAR Program for the state)
- Created a lead-worker position
- Entered into Inter-Agency Agreement with MN-DHS
  - Established reimbursements to the MDVA SOAR Program for applications worked, mileage, and training costs.
Pilot Implementation: Getting Started (Cont’d.)

- Hire SOAR Team Lead
  - Veteran
  - Master’s in Public Administration
  - Spent 6 years working at DDS as a disability examiner
  - Responsible for establishing the new program
Pilot Implementation:
Program Costs and Funding

- Interagency Agreement with Minnesota Dept. of Human Services
  - Stipends
  - Reimbursements

- Support Our Troops specialty license plate fund
  - Created to support Veteran initiatives
  - Funds shared 50-50 between Military Affairs (National Guard) and MDVA
  - Helps MDVA fund outreach activities and pilot programs for MN Veterans
Transferability

- MDVA uses established SOAR methodology (SAMHSA)
- Implemented additional strategies to increase effectiveness and efficiency utilizing resources available to the agency
  - Higher percentage of SSI/SSDI claim allowances
  - Fewer number of days for claim decision
- Review of existing partnerships and collaborations (Homeless Veterans Registry) and identifying new potential partners (MN-DHS) to develop innovative, sustainable income for at-risk Veterans
Pilot Implementation: Partnership with MN-DHS

- MN Dept. of Human Services recoups a percentage of a General Assistance participant’s award when that individual receives SSI benefits
  - Known as ‘SSI Interim Assistance Recovery Funds’

- The money saved and returned as a result of an individual gaining SSI benefits completely funds the reimbursement program DHS uses to promote the SOAR process when applying for Social Security Benefits

This cost savings also funds DHS’ social security advocacy program
Pilot Implementation: Partnership with MN-DHS (Cont’d.)

- MN-DHS’ Policy for Use of ‘SSI Interim Assistance Recovery Funds:

  “Up to 35% of the prior year’s recoveries under the General Assistance interim assistance provisions may be retained by the department to provide advocacy, support and claim processing services. This includes contracting with county agencies, qualified agencies, organizations or persons to provide advocacy and support services, and to process claims for federal disability benefits, for recipients or applicants of services or benefits supervised by the commissioner.”
Pilot Implementation: Partnership with MN-DHS (Cont’d.)

Initial SOAR Budget (MDVA):

$214K

Total reimbursements from MN-DHS (through 04/18):

$133.5K
How the Veteran SOAR Program Works

- **Step 1**
  - Identify potential SOAR candidates
  - Make them aware of the potential benefits (outreach)

*MDVA Collaboration efforts:*
  - Homeless Veterans Registry
  - County Veteran Service Officers

**LinkVet** is an MDVA hotline—staffed 7 days a week—to assist Veterans and connect them with appropriate benefit programs.
How the Veteran SOAR Program Works (Cont’d.)

Step 2

- Veteran added to Intake List (Referral is made)
- Veteran SOAR Representative contacts them to discuss the Veteran’s situation and how a certified representative is able to assist them and the potential benefits
- Veteran SOAR Representative will ensure eligibility at this point

Basic eligibility requirements:

- MN Veteran
- Is experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness
- Has a severe mental, physical, or co-occurring substance abuse impairment that has lasted or is expected to last more than one year
How the Veteran SOAR Program Works (Cont’d.)

- **Step 3**
  - Veteran SOAR Representative will assist in filing the SSI/SSDI claim and act as the Authorized Representative throughout the course of the claim
  - Help complete necessary forms
  - Provide medical updates
  - Collect and review medical records
  - Provide Medical Summary Review to DDS
  - Maintain contact with Veterans
How the Veteran SOAR Program Works (Cont’d.)

- If a claim is denied
  - Veteran SOAR Representative will continue to work with Veteran to appeal the denial

- If a claim is approved
  - Veteran SOAR Representative in a unique position connect Veterans with community partners to ensure their additional income results in a stable housing solution
Veteran SOAR Expansion

- MDVA identified the need to expand the program to reach a greater number of Veterans statewide
- Recently expanded to 3 full-time SOAR staff members
  - Subject matter experts
  - Completed SOAR Certification Process through SAMHSA
  - Participate in monthly MN-DHS provided SOAR Technical Assistance Training
Partnerships: Homeless Program

- Forming strong partnerships across the entire state with a myriad of different organizations and individuals has led to biweekly Registry Meetings
  - Broken up into different regions to emphasize more localized assistance
  - Meeting is facilitated by MDVA Homeless Veteran Coordinator (Ben Wilson)
Partnerships:
Homeless Veteran Program
Partnerships: Registry Meetings

- Meetings are designed so that every Veteran on the Registry receives 2-3 minutes of discussion.

- Example:
  “I met with John Doe, age 55, in triage this week. He has been homeless for the past 3 months—before that he was in an apartment for three years; Limited criminal background; Income = $1100/month from Social Security and VA Compensation—What are some options?”

- Ultimate plan of these meetings:
  To ensure that EVERY Veteran on the Registry has a community provider that is following up/assisting with a housing plan.
Partnerships:
Homeless Program

Expanding list of partners attending Registry Meetings

- All HRA, CDA, PHA, and other Minnesota County, City, or Tribal Housing Authorities
- All Minnesota County, City, or Tribal Human Service Office, Public Health Office, and Veteran Service Offices
- Beyond the Yellow Ribbon
- Bi-CAP
- Canvas Health
- CAPSH
- Churches United
- Catholic Charities
- Christian Cupboard
- Emergency Food Shelf
- CHUM
- Damiano Center
- Eagles Healing Nest
- Family Pathways
- Fargo-Moorhead
- Dorothy Day House of Hospitality
- Friends in Need
- Grace House Homeless Shelter
- Hearth Connections
- Heartland Community Action Agency
- Home and Away Ministries, Inc.
- Horizon Community
- Health Board
- House of Charity
- Institute for Community Alliances, for the Minnesota Homeless Management Information System
- Kootasca Community Action
- Listening House
- Lakes and Pines CAC
- Lutheran Social Services Department
- Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans
- Northwest Technical College for
- LinkVet,
- Veterans Linkage Line
- Our saviors housing
- People incorporated
- Prairie five community action
- New life center
- Radius health
- Stepping stone emergency housing
- St Andrews
- St Stephens human services
- The salvation army
- Simpson housing services
- TRI-CAP
- Union Gospel Mission
- US Department of Veterans affairs
- Valley outreach
Partnerships: Veteran SOAR

- Collaborative effort between MDVA and other partners
  - United States Dept. of Veterans Affairs
  - Social Security Administration
  - Minnesota Dept. of Human Services
  - Disability Determination Services
  - Others
Partnerships:
MN Dept. of Human Services

- MDVA works closely with MN-DHS
- DHS administers the SOAR Program statewide and houses two SOAR Co-State Leads
- DHS provides SOAR Technical Assistance Training
Partnerships:
Social Security Administration

- MDVA and DHS work very closely with the Social Security Administration
  - SSA fully supports the mission and the methodology of Minnesota SOAR
- Worked closely to solve procedural issues
  - Customized Intent to File form for use by Minnesota SOAR advocates
- Worked with SSA to expedite process to receive claimant’s SSA medical file for the purposes of filing an appeal
  - Fees also waived
The backbone of MDVA’s recent success in goal of preventing and ending Veteran homelessness in Minnesota has been the strong and fruitful partnerships established with others who had shared goals.
Results: Veteran SOAR

- The Veteran SOAR Program is over halfway through the pilot program term and the commitment to a collaborative approach has yielded successful results.

- While these results are promising, we continually re-assess the Veteran SOAR Program to ensure it’s efficient and effective.
  - Always looking for new partners (transportation to consultative exams)
  - Seeing where advancements in technology can increase access to clients
  - Constantly analyzing our goals and metrics to ensure our early successes continue to improve and identifying areas where we can improve.
Results: Pilot Projections (Through end of pilot program in 2019)

Veterans awarded SSI/SSDI Benefits:

123

Federal dollars (SSI/SSDI) brought into the State of Minnesota, annually:

$1.85M
Results:

Homeless Program

- The MDVA’s commitment to those four standards of better government has helped to begin to solve the wicked problem of preventing and ending Veteran homelessness in Minnesota.

- In 2017, we housed 479 previously homeless Veterans through Registry.

- Since 2010, there has been a 56% reduction in homelessness among Veterans in Minnesota compared to a 46% reduction nationally (2010-2017).

- As a state, we have stably housed over 1,400 previously homeless Veterans since the Registry kicked off in December 2014.
Results:
Homeless Program
Results: Homeless Program Cont’d.

- Veteran Housing Resources continue to expand statewide:
  - HUD-VASH Vouchers
  - CommonBond Upper Post – 58 units
  - Solid Ground: Frost English Apartment – 50 units
  - Richard A. Brustad Homes (Veterans East) – 100 units
  - Linden Grove Apartments – 37 units
  - Higher Ground St. Paul – 19 units
Thank you!

If you have any questions about the MDVA Veteran SOAR or Homeless Programs, please contact:

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