Homeless to Housed: Walking the Journey of Accessing Mainstream Benefits
Hello/Osiyo!

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Starting Point

Are you familiar with SOAR?

Does your agency/community assist people to apply for Social Security Disability Benefits (SSI/SSDI)?

Is there a need for timely access to SSI/SSDI in your community?
ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA
In 2022, instances of homelessness increased significantly for people with disabilities and individuals in unsheltered settings.

Single individuals represent the largest group of people experiencing homelessness; in 2022 the rate increased by 3.1%.

People who identify as Black, African American, African, and Indigenous continue to be overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness.
1 in 200
Members of Native Communities are unhoused vs. 1 in 1,000 of the United States population

Overrepresented
American Indian and Alaska Natives represent the 2nd highest rate of people experiencing homelessness when compared to other racial groups; around 8% of the unhoused population

Undercounted
Statistics do not capture all individuals experiencing homelessness that reside on reservations or those that do not fit HUD's definition of homelessness.
Unique

Native Communities also experience distinctive challenges that have contributed to and compounded issues of homelessness and poverty.

Multigenerational and multifamily households.

Native communities may experience limited community infrastructure, lack of essential utilities, sparse housing availability, and be in need of timely access supportive services.
“I was trying my best to stay alive.”

Bonnie's Story
Birdtail Sioux First Nation
SSI/SSDI
SNAP
General Assistance
Section 8
Housing First
TANF
PSH
PATH
VA Benefits
What We Do

SOAR

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery

SAMHSA SOAR Technical Assistance Center

Provides assistance with growing the SOAR initiative and supporting SOAR-trained case workers and communities
Culturally sensitive, trauma-informed, community-based model for assisting eligible applicants to apply for SSI/SSDI

SOAR assists applicants who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness

Serious and persistent mental or physical health diagnoses, which often co-occur

SOAR is active in all 50 states, but the initiative must grow in order to serve all those in need

SOAR seeks to answer the question, why is the applicant unable to work?
SSI/SSDI: An Overview

**Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**
- Eligibility based on need: low income and resources; living arrangement
- Monthly amount based on Federal Benefit Rate: $914/month (2023)
- Date of eligibility based on Protective Filing Date/Application Date
- Health insurance: Medicaid

**Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)**
- Eligibility based on insured status (FICA payments)
- Monthly amount based on earnings history
- Date of eligibility based on “date of onset” of disability, 5 month waiting period
- Health insurance: Medicare
SSA's Definition of Disability

Medical Conditions
- Diagnoses
- Documentation
- Duration

Functional Impairments
- Severity
- Work
- Substantial
- Gainful Activity (SGA)
SOAR Across the Lifespan

**Adults**
Age 18+
Eligible for both SSI and SSDI
Is the applicant able to work and earn at Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA)

**Youth & Young Adults**
Age 18-24
Eligible for SSI and/or SSDI (as a Disabled Adult Child)
Evaluated under the adult definition of disability
Age 18 Redetermination
Youth aging out of foster care

**Children**
Birth to age 18
Eligible for SSI only
How a child's functioning compares to a child of the same age who does not have impairments
What Makes SOAR Unique?

- Serving as the applicant's representative
- Collecting all medical records and developing new evidence when needed
- Writing a Medical Summary Report
- Submitting complete, high-quality applications
SOAR focuses on telling the applicant’s story and clearly linking their diagnoses to their functional limitations and work. Applicants are not just medical records or applications; they are people with goals, accomplishments, and dreams.
BIG Impact

INCOME

HEALTH INSURANCE

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

SUBSIDIZED OR SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

CONNECTION TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS
Outcomes

In 2022, SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications had a 68% approval rate in an average of 153 days.

Cumulative approval rate of 65%

The top 10 states have an average approval rate of 81%

Over 100,000 people served through SOAR!
SSA Commitment

The Social Security Administration is committed to serving Native Communities and offers many resources and services:

- Video Service Delivery locations
- Tribal Consultation & Coordinated Plan
- Ticket to Work & Tribal Employment Networks
Special Considerations

There are special considerations and exceptions for income and resources when applying for SSI/SSDI:

- Certain cash payments may not count toward resources (ex: Coball Court Case, Individual Indian Monies, etc.)
- SSA may not count allotted Indian land or money held in restricted IIM accounts
- Medicaid/Medicare can be used at Indian Health Service (IHS) clinics or for services not covered through IHS
SOAR in Native Communities

“It is truly important to take your time to get to know the applicant. Let them know you want them to succeed, and listen to their story. It is helpful to validate the experience of intergenerational trauma and always acknowledge the impact of colonization; honor community and the importance of the applicant’s Native identity.”

—Penny Wertenberger, SOAR-trained case worker, IHS-funded Urban Indian Clinic, Missoula, Montana
We know the statistics.

Native communities experience high rates of historical and generational trauma.

Systems that are designed to support our community often create barriers.

How can we help those in need navigate social supports with kindness, wisdom, and cultural competency?
Expanding SOAR in Native Communities

Community buy-in is critical!

What role can you/your agency contribute to the SOAR process?

Collaboration and communication is key!
Getting Involved in SOAR

Training

Time Commitment

Critical Components

Outcomes Tracking

Local Involvement
Becoming Trained

Standardized training across all geographic areas

Course is free and can be completed at your own pace

20 CEUs through the National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
Connecting with SOAR in Your Community

Your state/community may have an active SOAR initiative. Reach out to your state's SOAR TA Center Liaison and State Team Lead (STL). Resources may be limited, which is a great opportunity to become involved!
Transforming Lives
Open Discussion
Connect With Us

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WORKSHOP SURVEY

Participants who complete evaluations will be entered into a drawing to win prizes that will be presented at the Closing Plenary Session on Thursday at 3:30 PM.

From Conference App

Navigate to the session page through the agenda schedule

From Web Browser

Use the QR Code to access the survey from a web browser