

Starting A SOAR Project – A Tool To Reduce Homelessness

www.prainc.com/soar

SOAR

- SOAR stands for “SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery”.
- SOAR is more than a technique – it is a comprehensive local initiative requiring leadership, broad stakeholder participation, common goals, and common understandings.

SSI and SSDI

- SSI: Supplemental Security Income; federal benefit rate is \$637 per month in 2008; provides Medicaid in most states
- SSDI: Social Security Disability Insurance; amount of benefit dependent on earnings put into SSA system; Medicare provided after two years of eligibility in most instances
- The disability determination process for both programs is the same; when one applies for SSI, they are usually review by SSA for their eligibility for SSDI as well.

Why is Access to SSI and SSDI Important for Homeless Recipients?

- SSA disability benefits can provide access to:
 - Housing
 - Income
 - Health insurance

Why Is Access to SSI and SSDI Important for State and Localities?

- Homeless people are frequent users of expensive uncompensated health care.
- Providers can recoup the cost of uncompensated health expenses from Medicaid for up to 3 months prior to date of SSI application.
- States that fund health care for low income and/or disabled persons can save state dollars once Medicaid is approved.

Why Is Access to SSI and SSDI Important for State and Localities?

- States and localities can recoup from SSA the cost of public general assistance provided to homeless applicants during the SSI/SSDI determination period.
- SSI, SSDI and Medicaid bring federal dollars into states, localities and community programs.

The Problem

- The SSI application process is difficult for people who are homeless, many of whom have mental illnesses and co-occurring substance use disorders
- Only about 10-15 percent of those who apply are typically approved on initial application
- Appeals take years and many potentially eligible people give up and do not appeal

Why Is Access To SSI So Difficult?

- People who are homeless need assistance to apply for SSI
- They need adequate assessment and documentation of how their disabling conditions limit their ability to work
- Providers who assist SSI applicants need staff who understand the disability determination process and who have time to assist in all aspects of developing the application
- Relationships with SSA, the state Disability Determination Service (DDS), community medical providers and others are essential to changing the outcomes of SSI/SSDI applications

What We Know Is Possible...

**Approval rates of 65-95%
on initial application
for homeless applicants**

SOAR Technical Assistance Initiative

- SOAR stands for “SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery”
- Strategy to help States and communities increase access to SSI and SSDI for people who are homeless through training, technical assistance and strategic planning
- Includes use of SAMHSA’s *Stepping Stones to Recovery* training curriculum

How Is This Model Different?

- Case managers actively assist applicants
- Step-by-step explanation of SSI application and disability determination process
- Focuses on the initial application – “Get it right the first time!”
- Avoids appeals whenever possible
- Focuses on documenting the disability

What Does It Take?

- Ensure adequate staffing
- Use the SOAR Critical Components
 - www.prainc.com/SOAR/about/CriticalComponentsChart.pdf
 - Focus on the initial application
 - Become an applicant's representative (SSA Form 1696)
 - Work closely with community medical providers
 - Reach out to hospital and clinic medical records departments
 - Reduce the need for consultative exams
 - Develop medical summary reports signed by a physician or psychologist
- Provide training and quality control
- Collaborate with SSA and DDS
- Collect and report on outcomes

Conclusion

- **Focusing on expediting benefits works!**
- **Its a win-win for the individual, for states and localities, and for community programs**
- **A major tool in recovery from homelessness**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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