

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR): Pennsylvania Balance of State Continuum of Care Presentation

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
(SAMHSA) SOAR Technical Assistance Center
Policy Research Associates, Inc.

November 16, 2022



SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

1

Disclaimer

The views, opinions, and content expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

2

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

2

What is SOAR?

- A model for assisting eligible individuals to apply for Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits
- For individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, co-occurring substance use disorder, or other physical disabilities
- Sponsored by SAMHSA in collaboration with the Social Security Administration (SSA) since 2005
- All 50 states and Washington, DC currently participate

3



3

Comparison of SSI and SSDI

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

- Eligibility based on need: low income and resources; living arrangement
- Monthly amount based on Federal Benefit Rate: \$841/month in 2022 (\$914/month in 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
- 2-year waiting period for Medicare

4



4

SSA's Definition of Disability for Adults

- The inability to engage in any *substantial gainful activity (SGA)* (\$1,350/month in 2022)
- By reason of any *medically determinable* physical or mental *impairment(s)*
- Which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.

5

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

5

SSI/SSDI Eligibility: Breaking Down the Definition

SSA's Definition of Disability



Medical
Condition(s)

- Diagnosis
- Documentation
- Duration



Functional
Impairment(s)

- Severity
- Work
- SGA

6

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

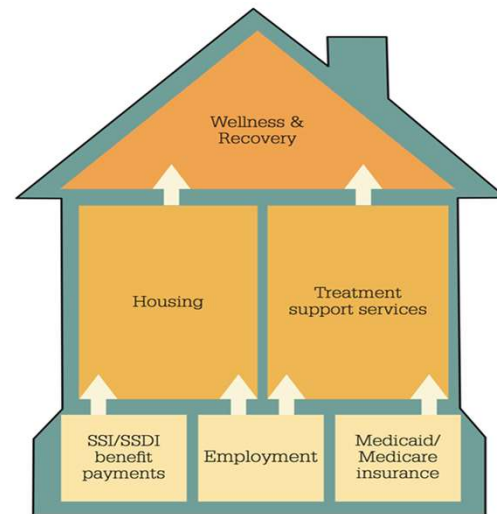
6

A Foundation for Recovery and Resiliency

More Than Income

- Access to more robust health care and housing
- Increased education and employment opportunities
- Decrease in incarcerations and hospitalizations
- Ability to maximize income

SSI/SSDI: One Brick in Foundation

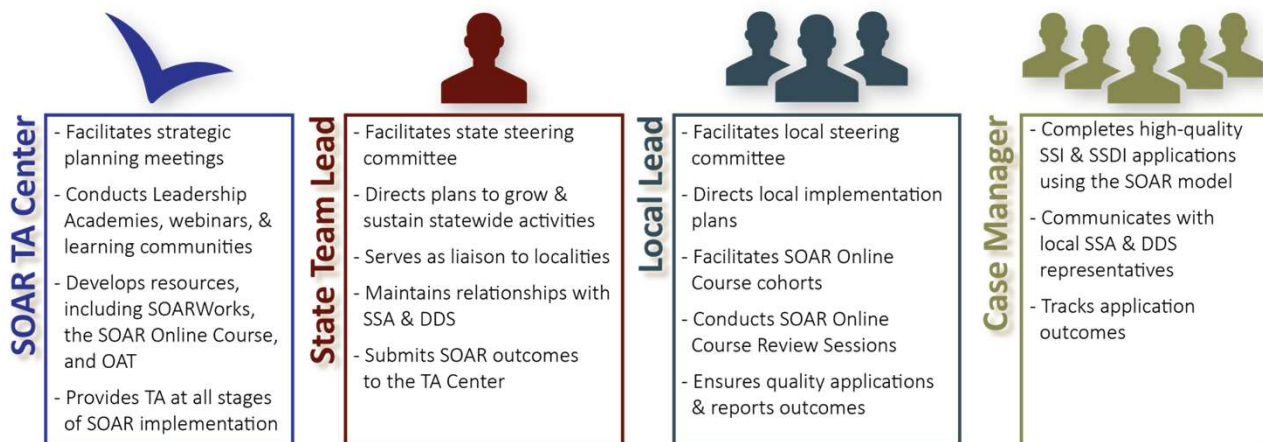


SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

7

7

SOAR Leadership Structure



*OAT: Online Application Tracking Program

*DDS: Disability Determination Services

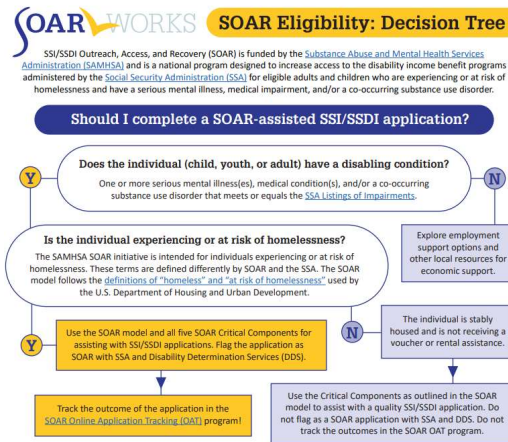
*TA: Technical Assistance

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

8

Who is a SOAR Applicant?

We want to ensure that ALL eligible applicants are served appropriately.



Reducing Implicit Bias and DEI Considerations for Identifying SOAR Applicants

The SAMHSA SOAR TA Center is working to reduce the influence of implicit bias and encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion during the process of identifying potential applicants to assist with SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications. Included are helpful tips to consider when utilizing the Identifying SOAR Applicants tool. This guidance asks you to consider how a potential applicant's racial, ethnic, and cultural views regarding disabilities, diagnoses, symptoms, and treatment as well as their socioeconomic and homelessness status may factor into a SOAR caseworker's decision to assist them with a SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI application.

The overarching questions we encourage you to ask yourself are:

- Am I only assisting individuals with SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications who have a formally diagnosed mental and/or physical health condition(s) and who are currently engaged in treatment?
- Am I "screening out" potential SOAR applicants who may qualify for SSI/SSDI benefits, but do not yet have a formal diagnosis and have not yet received treatment?

Eligibility Criteria for SSA Disability Benefits	Information to Consider
Key Eligibility Criteria for SSA Disability Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there racial, ethnic, or cultural reasons why a potential applicant may not consider themselves as someone who has a disability, serious mental illness, or has mental health symptoms? Are there reasons such as current mental health symptoms/impairments and education level which may prevent a person from being able to accurately describe their illness, symptoms, and functional limitations? Are there engagement and communication strategies that you can employ when working to identify a potential SOAR applicant that keep these considerations in mind?
SOAR Recommends: Characteristics that may Strengthen an SSI/SSDI Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there racial, ethnic, or cultural reasons why a potential applicant might not be taking psychiatric medications? Are there racial, ethnic, or cultural reasons why a potential applicant might not be receiving psychiatric treatment for their mental illness or medical condition(s)? Are there reasons such as current mental health symptoms/impairments and education level which may prevent a person from being able to accurately describe their illness, symptoms, and functional limitations? Are there engagement and communication strategies that you can employ when working to identify a potential SOAR applicant that keep these considerations in mind?
SOAR Recommends: Characteristics that may Strengthen an SSI/SSDI Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there racial, ethnic, or cultural reasons why a potential applicant might not be taking psychiatric medications? Are there racial, ethnic, or cultural reasons why a potential applicant might not be receiving psychiatric treatment for their mental illness or medical condition(s)? Is there community stigma associated with mental illness or physical disability they are currently or have historically experienced? Does the potential applicant have significantly less access to psychiatric and/or medical treatment in their community that may be related to their race, ethnicity, culture, or socioeconomic status? Has the potential applicant been unable to access psychiatric and/or medical treatment due to their lack of income, lack of health insurance, and/or homelessness status? Before "screening out" a potential applicant who does not take psychiatric medications and does not yet have obtainable medical evidence, can you employ any outreach strategies that may assist this potential applicant with accessing this treatment or an assessment for their illness(es)/condition(s)?



9

9

What Makes SOAR Unique?



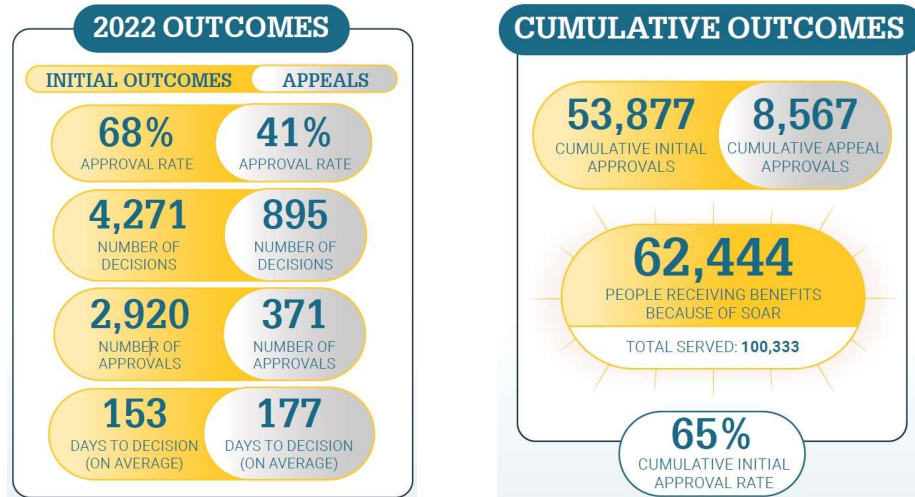
SOAR-trained case workers are the heroes!



10

10

SOAR Works!



*National SOAR outcomes as of June 30, 2022

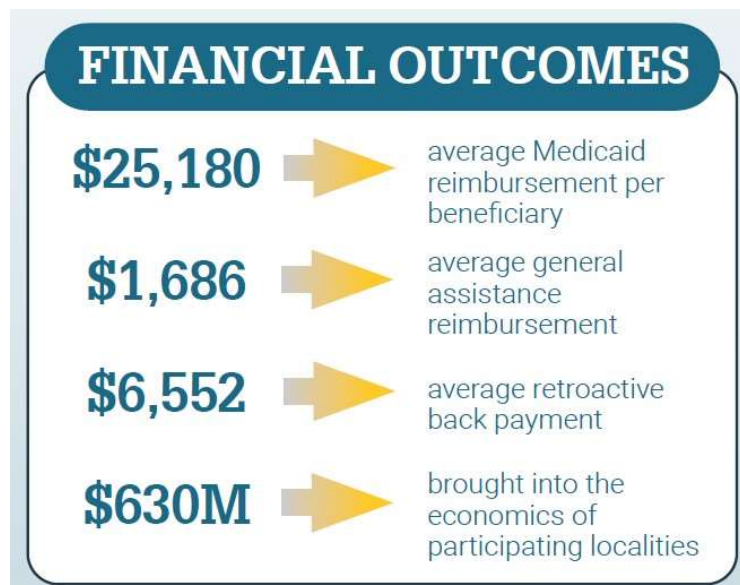
<https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/article/soar-outcomes-and-impact>

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

11

11

2022 Financial Outcomes

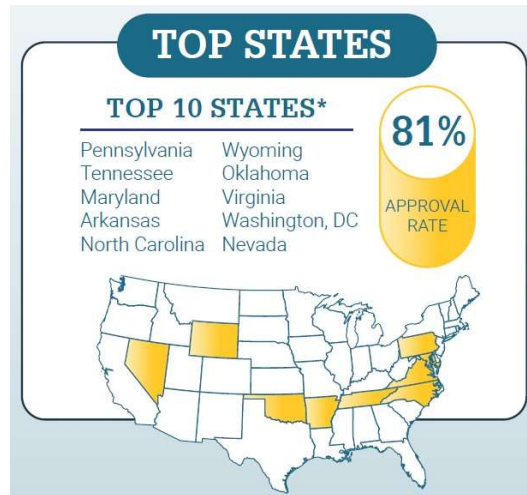


SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

12

12

SOAR Super Stars!



SOAR Critical Components

Using these five SOAR Critical Components, case workers play a central role in gathering complete, targeted, and relevant information for SSA and DDS, resulting in high-quality SSI/SSDI applications. These components significantly increase the likelihood of an approval for those who are eligible.

1. Serving as the Applicant's Representative
2. Collecting and Submitting Medical Records
3. Writing and Submitting a Medical Summary Report (MSR)
4. Obtaining a Co-signature on the MSR by an Acceptable Medical Source
5. Completing a Quality Review of Applications Prior to Submission

*Inclusion: Highest cumulative approval rates on initial application for states with at least 300 cumulative decisions, at least 24 decisions in 2022 (2 per month), and a 2022 approval rate above the national average.

13 Combined, these states had 20,551 decisions

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

13

Pennsylvania State Outcomes

- Pennsylvania
 - 346 SOAR-assisted applications
 - 91% approval rate
 - 102 average days to decision
- Philadelphia
 - 218 SOAR-assisted applications
 - 97% approval rate
 - 72 average days to decision
- Pittsburgh
 - 83 SOAR-assisted applications
 - 83% approval rate
 - 154 average days to decision
- Outcomes from other areas: 45 decisions

14

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

14

SOARWorks Pennsylvania: Looking Forward

- Continue to grow SOAR throughout the state, emphasizing the BOS counties
- Establish additional SOAR Local Leads
- Gain additional funding for SOAR dedicated staff
- Increase the number of SOAR assisted applications statewide

15



15

Critical Components of SOAR

What Makes SOAR Unique

16



16

The SOAR Critical Components

- As the applicant's representative a SOAR-trained case worker works collaboratively with the applicant to submit a complete SSI/SSDI application:
 - Regular communication with the applicant
 - Extensive engagement process
 - Clearly link the applicant's diagnoses to their functional limitation
 - Case worker will communicate regularly with SSA and DDS, and provide additional information when needed



SOAR Critical Components

Using these five SOAR Critical Components, case workers play a central role in gathering complete, targeted, and relevant information for SSA and DDS, resulting in high-quality SSI/SSDI applications. These components significantly increase the likelihood of an approval for those who are eligible.

1. Serving as the Applicant's Representative
2. Collecting and Submitting Medical Records
3. Writing and Submitting a Medical Summary Report (MSR)
4. Obtaining a Co-signature on the MSR by an Acceptable Medical Source
5. Completing a Quality Review of Applications Prior to Submission

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

17

17

Engagement

- Truly getting to know the applicant
- Working collaboratively with the applicant to tell their story, but understanding that the SOAR CW drives the process
- Meeting and engaging with the applicant over the 60 days, and then with SSA and DDD once submitted
- Provide warm hand offs when needed

18

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

18

Medical Summary Report (MSR)

- The MSR is a letter which describes the individual and their limitations in functioning
 - Supports medical records submitted
 - Provides a clear link between an applicant's conditions and functional limitations
 - Often takes place of the SSA-3373 Function Report
 - Is medical evidence when co-signed by an Acceptable Medical Source
 - Can be sent directly to the DDS examiner or hand delivered to SSA
- Answers the question: "Can the person work and earn SGA?"
- Submitted as part of the completed application

21



21

Collaboration is Key!

Guide to Collaborating with the Social Security Administration and Disability Determination Services

Purpose of the Guide

- Develop successful working relationships with the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS).
- Provide examples of how successful relationships benefit SOAR-trained case managers, SSA and DDS.

Strategies for Collaborating with the Social Security Administration		
Strategy #1. Designated SSA Liaison – Identify a liaison at the local SSA office to communicate with SOAR-trained case managers. The liaison is the main point of contact for checking current claim status, setting the applicant's protective filing date and troubleshooting any issues that may arise during the application process.		
Benefits to SSA	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SOAR case manager serves as the applicant's representative ▪ SOAR case manager maintains regular communication with SSA liaison ▪ SSA has better communication with applicants experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness ▪ Claim may be processed more quickly because SSA will get immediate responses to requests for additional information ▪ SSA liaison will become experienced with SOAR and working with people who are homeless ▪ SSA liaison will build relationships with SOAR provider agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SSA liaison gives SOAR case managers a single contact for seamless receipt of the application ▪ SSA liaison becomes familiar with SOAR and SOAR case managers in the community ▪ SSA liaison can facilitate communication within SSA to resolve issues as they arise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Boston, Massachusetts has identified a SOAR liaison at one of the area's many SSA offices (which includes Boston and the surrounding areas); SOAR-trained case managers submit all applications to one office where they are processed by the designated SOAR liaison. ▪ Pittsburgh, PA has multiple SSA offices that serve the city. The Local SOAR Lead works with an identified SOAR liaison at each SSA field office, who assists in processing SSI/SSDI applications for SOAR applicants
Strategy #2. Community Meetings – A representative from local Social Security offices participates in community planning meetings and SOAR Steering Committee meetings to identify areas of collaboration, resolve barriers and share best practices.		

22

[SSA + DDS Collaboration Guide -072017 FINAL.pdf \(samhsa.gov\)](#)



22

Making SOARWork within the BOS

What's working in other states!

23

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

23

SOAR and Coordinated Entry

"I am most proud of implementing SOAR into our coordinated entry system. We have amazing collaborations with our local health care and housing service providers to be able to develop a formalized SOAR system. We are working to connect the most vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness in our community to benefits as quickly and efficiently as possible."

— **Niki Kozak**, SOAR Local Lead, Austin, TX

24



SOAR and Coordinated Entry



As mandated by the HEARTH Act, communities funded by HUD's Continuum of Care (CoC) program are planning and implementing coordinated entry systems. As these systems are implemented, it is important to identify individuals who are unable to sustain work at a substantial gainful level and may be eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Incorporating disability related questions into a community's coordinated entry system can assist in identifying potential SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) applicants.

Coordinated Entry Systems

HUD requires all CoCs to establish and operate a coordinated or centralized assessment system to increase the efficiency of their local crisis response systems, ensuring easy and fair access to resources for individuals experiencing homelessness. A critical aspect of coordinated entry systems is assessing an individual or family's need for housing and supportive services and providing quick connections to housing and service providers.

Many communities are incorporating basic SSI/SSDI eligibility questions into their coordinated entry assessments, so that individuals without adequate income who may qualify for Social Security disability benefits receive immediate referrals to local SOAR providers and employment services, as appropriate. These assessments for income support needs are done concurrently with housing-related needs assessments, such that individuals experiencing homelessness are rapidly placed into housing and referred to appropriate supportive services as needed and desired.

Common Assessment Tools

Common Assessment tools are a required element of Coordinated Entry. Already being used in many coordinated entry systems and CoCs, Common Assessment Tools quickly assess the health and social needs of individuals experiencing homelessness so they can be matched with appropriate housing resources.

Below are indicators from Common Assessment Tools that may help identify potential eligibility for SSA disability benefits and appropriate SOAR referral:

- Past hospitalization against the person's will and/or current mental health treatment
- Self-report of multiple physical health conditions or observations of serious health conditions
- Tri-morbidity (co-occurring mental and substance use disorder with a chronic medical condition)
- Observations of poor hygiene or living skills
- History of serious brain injury or head trauma
- Difficulty in concentrating and remembering things
- Self-reported disability or diagnoses information

Common Assessment Tools are only one "tool in the toolbox" as part of a community's overall housing prioritization strategy. However, using the Common Assessment to prioritize SOAR assistance, we

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) Technical Assistance Center

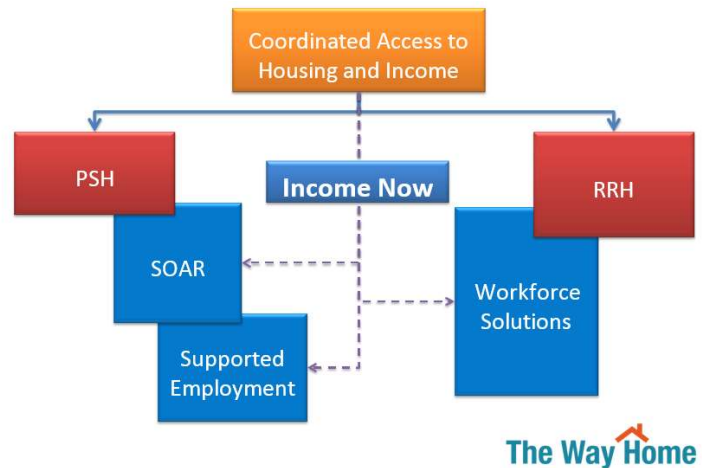
April 16, 2018

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

24

Coordinated Entry in Texas

- Applicant presents at a coordinated entry HUB.
- If the applicant meets the eligibility criteria *Income Now* matches them directly with a SOAR-trained case manager.
- The applicant may also be involved in supported employment or search for mainstream competitive employment.

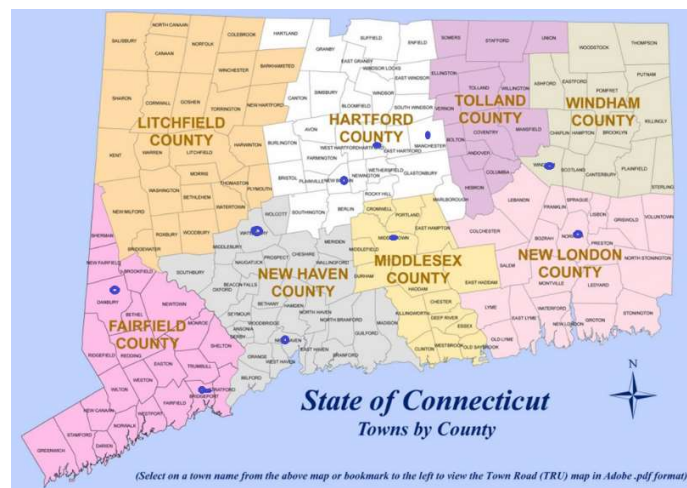


SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

25

SOARWorks in Connecticut

- The State of Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) funds 8 full-time, dedicated SOAR staff; funding has been secured through March of 2025.
- The positions ensure that there are dedicated SOAR staff in each of the Coordinated Access Networks, Connecticut's system for providing homeless services
- Support includes monthly case conferencing, development of a SOAR program manual, SOAR screening process, and referral tools



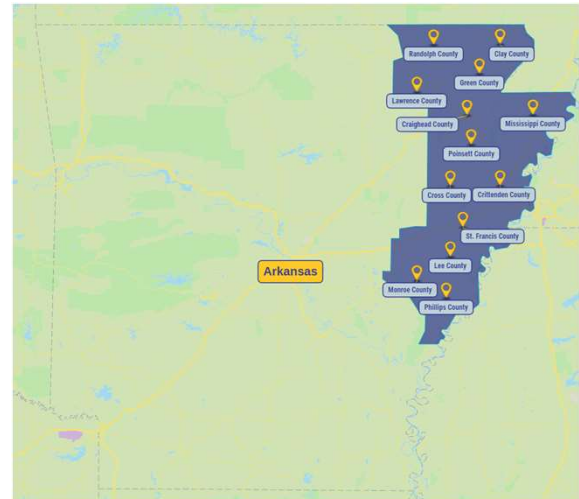
SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

26

26

Rural Implementation in Jonesboro, Arkansas

- SOAR initiative covers 13 counties in Northeast Arkansas with at least two SOAR trained case workers in each county
- Educate all new employees on SOAR and create a strong internal referral system
- In-house medical staff, wrap around services
- Strong SSA/DDS relationships



27

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

27

Successful SOAR Communities

- Form local SOAR steering groups
- Identify local SOAR leaders
- Identify one or more benefits specialists in each locality
- Assess and refer SOAR applicants
- Provide ongoing support for benefits specialists
- Review applications for quality before submission
- Conduct SOAR Online Course Review Sessions for new trainees
- Ask SSA and DDS for feedback
- Monitor outcomes to identify challenges and to leverage funding
- Use the SOAR Online Course for training and refresher

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

28

Questions?

Question & Answer
Open Discussion



29

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

29

Helpful Links

- Getting Involved with SOAR: [Getting Involved with SOAR | SOAR Works! \(samhsa.gov\)](https://www.samhsa.gov/soar/getting-involved)
- SOAR Online Courses: [Online Courses | SOAR Works! \(samhsa.gov\)](https://www.samhsa.gov/soar/online-courses)
- SOAR Outcomes: [2022 National SOAR Outcomes | SOAR Works! \(samhsa.gov\)](https://www.samhsa.gov/soar/outcomes)
- Hiring and Supervisors Guide: [Hiring and Supervising SOAR Case Workers | SOAR Works! \(samhsa.gov\)](https://www.samhsa.gov/soar/hiring-supervisors)

30

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

30

Connect with us!

Courtney Iorio
 Pennsylvania SOAR State Team Lead and PATH State Contact
 Department of Human Services
 Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
 ciorio@pa.gov
 717-346-0752

Abby Kirkman
 Assistant Director, Pennsylvania Liaison
 SAMHSA SOAR Technical Assistance Center
 at Policy Research Associates, Inc.
 akirkman@prainc.com
 (518) 439-7415, EXT: 5226

31



31

Thank You

SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

<https://soarworks.prainc.com>

soar@prainc.com

www.samhsa.gov

1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727) • 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)

32

32