



United States Interagency Council On Homelessness

Federal Programs Increase Access to Benefits



The [Social Security Administration \(SSA\)](#) is among many federal agencies working with state and local communities to assist people who are dealing with homelessness and /or with mental health issues. Through its [Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\)](#) and [Social Security Disability Insurance \(SSDI\)](#) programs, SSA provides critical income support for those who meet eligibility requirements.

As an SSA report noted, for homeless individuals who are disabled or age 65 or older, "SSA plays a critical role in helping provide monthly benefit payments and linkages to medical and nutrition services." SSA is an important resource in achieving the goal to end homelessness as the SSA benefit programs provide "a basis of support around which a case manager can build a network of services and support that includes housing, medical coverage, rehabilitation services and job training," the report goes on to say.

Last year, SSA Commissioner Michael Astrue announced that improvements to the agency's computer modeling system increased the number of claimants receiving expedited approvals for disability benefits. SSA's two-track system—the Quick Disability Determination (QDD) process and Compassionate Allowances—is now fast-tracking about 4 percent of all disability cases, an increase from the 2.7 percent of cases fast-tracked last year.

"In practical terms, this means...disabled Americans—those with the most severe disabilities—will be approved for benefits in about 10 days instead of waiting the three to four months it typically takes for an initial decision," Commissioner Astrue said.

To reduce the waiting time, SSA encourages groups and advocates assisting individuals in applying for disability to complete and submit the [Internet Adult Disability and Work History Report](#), developed specifically for third parties. As we go to press, we are expecting SSA to announce a move to use one form for both individual applicants and third-party advocates. Go to the [SSA website](#) for the most up-to-date information.

SSA is moving toward an automated, integrated application process for all programs administered by the agency. A date has not yet been announced but when it is, we will include the information in an upcoming newsletter.

SOAR Initiative

The [SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery \(SOAR\)](#) initiative aims to improve access to SSI/SSDI benefits for individuals who are homeless through a multi-pronged strategy designed to mitigate the challenges this population faces when navigating the SSI/SSDI application process. One important aspect is the provision of technical and strategic planning assistance to help states develop policies and procedures that will aid homeless individuals obtain SSI/SSDI. Such assistance aims to bring social service providers, advocates for the homeless, and other state and local agencies together to determine how to create an effective system for obtaining SSI/SSDI.

Another important SOAR feature is the program that trains case managers, social workers, and other staff in Stepping Stones to Recovery—a curriculum explicitly designed to provide case managers and other advocates with the skills and information needed to support homeless men and women through the SSI/SSDI application process. SOAR employs a train-the-trainer model in which a technical assistance contractor trains a few staff in interested states who then train others in their respective states.

SOAR has the potential to help end homelessness in two ways. First, the technical and strategic planning assistance to states encourages the development of new cross-agency collaborations and changes how case managers perform their work. Second, increased SSI/SSDI receipt among those who are homeless translates into the availability of greater financial and medical resources, ultimately improving quality of life.

HOPE Initiative

The [Homeless Outreach Projects and Evaluation \(HOPE\)](#) initiative (2003-2007) was focused on assisting eligible, chronically homeless individuals in applying for SSI and SSDI benefits. Projects funded by HOPE grants helped SSA demonstrate the effectiveness of using skilled medical and social service providers to identify, engage, and assist homeless individuals with disabling conditions file for benefits within current policy. Grantees were required to provide outreach, supportive services, and benefit application assistance to chronically homeless adults and children. Individual HOPE projects also included presumptive disability screening, pre-release procedures for institutionalized individuals with disabilities, the provision of representative payee services, the development of employment interventions, and the use of electronic applications to file for benefits. The final evaluation report from the HOPE initiative is available at <http://www.ssa.gov/homelessness/docs/hopefinalreport.doc>

Click on the underlined links within the story to read more about these programs.