

Introduction to SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery) for Native Communities

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

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SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

Disclaimer

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Introductions

- Wanda Johns, Co-SOAR State Team Lead
 - Washington State Health Care Authority
- Darla Johnson, Co-SOAR State Team Lead
 - Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
- Kristin Lupfer, Project Director
 - SAMHSA SOAR TA Center
- Stephanie Winker, Seattle and Denver Regional Offices
 - Social Security Administration

Purpose and Objectives

- Share the importance of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits for urban and rural Native Communities
 - Including income, health insurance, education and employment supports, and housing stability
- Offer opportunities for community members to get involved with SOAR
 - Connecting to local SOAR efforts, the SOAR Online Course, and the SOAR Online Application Tracking (OAT) program

What is SOAR?



- SOAR is culturally sensitive, trauma informed, community based 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

SSI and SSDI: The Basics

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

- Eligibility based on need: low income and resources; living arrangement
- Monthly amount based on Federal Benefit Rate: \$794/month (2021)*
- 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

SSI/SSDI Eligibility: Definition of Disability for Adults

SSA's Definition of Disability



Medical
Condition(s)

- Diagnosis
- Documentation
- Duration



Functional
Impairment(s)

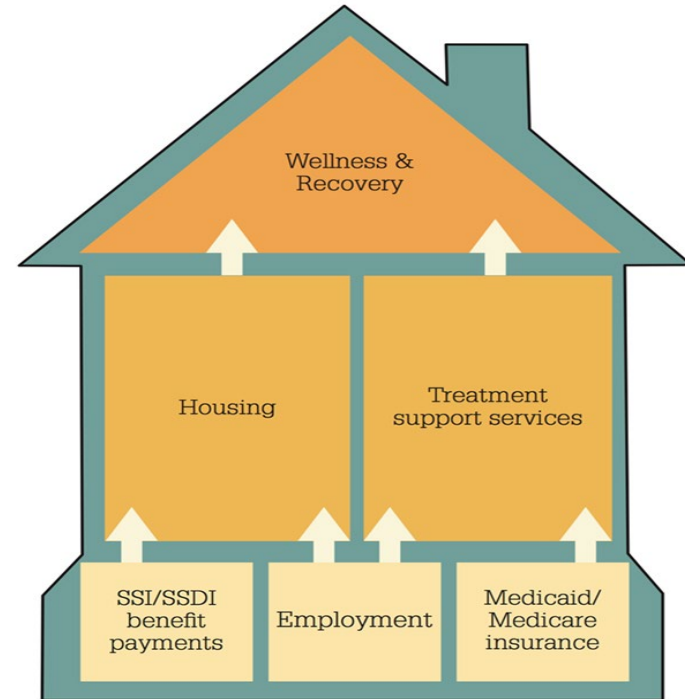
- Severity
- Work
- SGA

A Foundation for Recovery and Resiliency

More Than Income

- Access to health care and housing
- Increased education and employment opportunities
- Decrease in incarcerations and hospitalizations

SSI/SSDI: One Brick in Foundation



What Makes SOAR Unique?



SOAR-trained case workers are the heroes!



SOAR Works!

Cumulative Outcomes

CUMULATIVE INITIAL
APPROVAL RATE

65%

47,751

Cumulative
initial approvals

7,459

Cumulative
appeal approvals

55,210

people receiving benefits
because of SOAR

*National SOAR outcomes as of June 30, 2020

<https://soarworks.prainc.com/article/soar-outcomes-and-impact>

2020 National Outcomes

Application Type	Approval Rate	Number of Approvals	Average Days to Decision
Initial	65%*	4,265	115
Appeals	50%	868	211

Financial Outcomes		
Average General Assistance Reimbursement	Average Medicaid Reimbursement	Average Retroactive Back Payment
\$3,144	\$10,529	\$6,821

SOAR Super Stars!



76%

APPROVAL
RATE

Top States

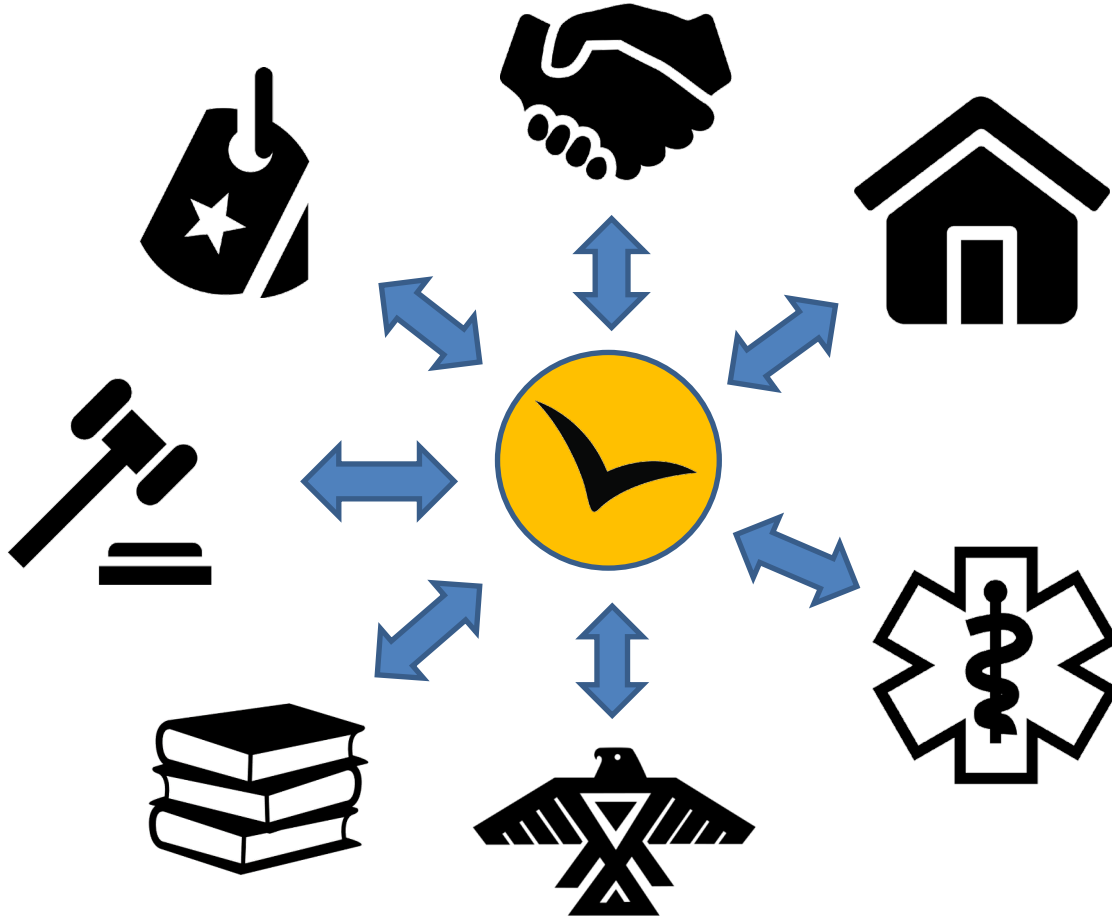
TOP 10 STATES*

Pennsylvania	Oklahoma
Tennessee	Virginia
Maryland	Oregon
Arkansas	Georgia
North Carolina	Michigan

*Inclusion: Highest cumulative approval rates on initial application for states with at least 325 cumulative decisions, at least 24 decisions in 2020 (2 per month), and a 2020 approval rate above the national average. **Combined, these states had 26,323 decisions**

- Directory of Local Leads:
 - <https://soarworks.prainc.com/node/1022/trainers-leaders>
 - Clark, King, Pierce, Spokane, Snohomish

Keys to Success: Community Collaborations



Getting Involved with SOAR: The SOAR Online Course!



SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Online Course: Adult Curriculum

- Standardized training provided across all geographic areas
- SOAR Leaders can coordinate follow-up training and support
- Course is FREE, web-based, and self-guided
- 20 CEUs from National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

SOAR Online Course: Articles and Practice Case

Articles and Content

SOAR WORKS SAMHSA
SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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SOAR in Your State | Online Courses | OAT & Outcomes | Library & Tools | Ask a Question

Current course: SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Online Course: Adult Curriculum

What is SOAR?

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) is a program designed to increase access to Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits for eligible individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder.

Many people with disabilities who experience homelessness or are at risk of homelessness (e.g., those returning to the community from institutions such as jails, prisons, or hospitals) struggle to access the resources they need. Many suffer from disabling mental illnesses, co-occurring substance use, trauma, and medical issues that impact their ability to work. The path to recovery can be extraordinarily challenging when one is constantly struggling to meet basic needs. Having income and health care benefits is often a critical first step on the road to recovery.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has two programs that can provide assistance.

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a needs-based program, for individuals who are blind, disabled, or elderly, with low income/resources
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) for blind or disabled individuals who are insured through employee and employer contributions to the Social Security Trust Fund
- In most states, Medicaid and/or Medicare health insurance accompany these benefits for those eligible

Circumstances can impede access to income and health care benefits.

- SSA communicates mainly by mail, which is a challenge when one does not have a permanent, reliable address.
- People who are experiencing homelessness often have sporadic medical care, making it difficult to access medical records to document disability.
- Symptoms can interfere with cognitive functioning, making it difficult to navigate a complex system.
- SOAR helps to overcome these barriers!

SOAR = SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery
SOAR is a Best Practice supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

- Designed to help states increase access to SSI/SSDI for eligible adults who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a co-occurring mental

CLASSES IN THIS COURSE

1. The Need for SOAR
 - Class Home
 - 1. What is SOAR?
 - 2. Overview of Social Security Disability Programs: SSI and SSDI
 - 3. SSA: What is Disability?
 - 4. Access to SSA Disability Programs: Players, Roles & Tasks
 - 5. Steps in the SSA Disability Application Process
 - 6. Disability Determination: The SSA Sequential Evaluation
 - 7. The SOAR Model: Critical Components
 - 8. The SOAR Process: Critical Components in Action
 - 9. Definitions of Homelessness
 - 10. Identifying SOAR Applicants
 - 11. SOAR Values
 - 12. Try It! Key Concepts of Class 1
 - 13. Conclusion

Meet Your Client - Practice Case
2. Initiating the Application
3. Exploring Basic Eligibility
4. Medical Information
5. The Link to Functioning
6. Completing the Application Packet
7. Supporting Resiliency and Recovery

Practice Case

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Current course: SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Online Course: Adult Curriculum

Practice Case: Meet Your Client

Welcome to the SOAR Online Course Practice Case!

Practice Case pages appear at the end of each class, designated by a briefcase icon. Detailed instructions are provided under "Tasks for This Class."

Your name is "Kristin Smith" from XYZ Community Mental Health Center and you are assisting "Michael Byrnes" to apply for SSI/SSDI. You will learn more about Michael on each Practice Case page via interview videos, progress notes, and medical records.

Let's meet Michael...

Tasks for this Class:

- ✓ **SAVE ALL OF THE DOCUMENTS** provided in the PRACTICE CASE MATERIALS BOX
 - Right-click on each file, choose "Save Target As" or "Save Link As," and save in an easily-accessible location on YOUR computer. (Having difficulty? Here are some troubleshooting tips.)
 - Review the four "Guides"/"Tips" - these will help you proceed successfully through the Course/Practice Case.
 - The five SSA forms and a Medical Summary Report will be uploaded later in the Course once you have learned more about your applicant and are able to complete them.
- ✓ **VIEW THE APPLICANT INTERVIEW VIDEO**
 - Take notes on what you observe about the applicant.
 - You can come back to this page at any time to view the video again.

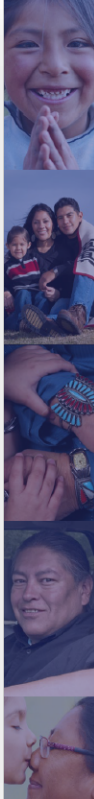
Practice Case Materials:

- Practice Case Task Guide.pdf
- SSA Forms Guide.pdf
- Practice Case MSR Tips.pdf
- MSR Interview Guide and Template.docx
- SSA-1696 Appointment of Representative.pdf

SOAR Case Study - Male Part 1

Getting Involved: Time Commitment

- Training: 20 hours
- 20-40 hours per complete application
- SOAR Critical Components
- Outcome Tracking
- Benefit to your tribal community or organization and the individuals You Serve



SOAR WORKS
Getting Involved with SOAR in Tribal Communities:
You want to be a SOAR provider? That's great! Here's what to expect.

SOAR promotes recovery and wellness through increased access to Social Security disability benefits for eligible American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder. SOAR providers assist individuals with complete and quality applications. This is not an easy task, but we believe it is well worth the effort!

Training

The SOAR Online Course trains providers to assist individuals with the Social Security disability application process. The course includes an Adult Curriculum for assisting with Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) claims for adults and a Child Curriculum for assisting with SSI claims for children (under the age of 18).

- The SOAR Online Course: Adult and Child Curricula are free and are located on the SOARWorks website (<https://soarworks.praire.com/content/soar-online-course-catalog>).
- Each curriculum consists of seven classes, each of which has a series of articles, short quizzes, and a practice case component. The practice case provides an opportunity for trainees to apply what they have learned in the course by completing a sample application packet for a fictitious applicant using SOAR techniques.
- It takes approximately 20 hours to complete each curriculum and participants can work at their own pace, starting and stopping as they wish. However, we encourage students to complete the curriculum within 30 days to retain the information learned.
- Upon successful completion, participants will receive 20 continuing education units from the National Association of Social Workers.

Many SOAR Local Leads offer 1-day SOAR Online Course Review Sessions to review key components of the curriculum, discuss tribal, state and local practices, and connect new providers to local Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS) offices.

Time Commitment

We estimate that each SOAR application will take approximately 20-40 hours to complete, from initial engagement to receiving a decision on a claim. This generally occurs over the course of 60-90 days.

- The time spent on each application will vary depending on the amount of engagement that is needed as well as other variables such as the experience level of the SOAR worker. For example, engagement with an applicant who is residing in an institution may take 20 hours, while it may take longer to connect with someone who is living outside or difficult to contact.

SOAR Critical Components

SOAR providers with higher approval rates credit their success to implementing the SOAR critical components¹ and submitting high-quality applications. Use of these components significantly

1 <https://soarworks.praire.com/article/soar-model-critical-components>

SOAR Technical Assistance

The SAMHSA SOAR TA Center is available to assist with SOAR in your community!

- Assistance with planning for SOAR implementation
- Facilitating a SOAR 101
- Bringing stakeholders together to discuss how SOAR can benefit your agency or native community
- Beginning a pilot program
- SOAR Online Course cohorts and assistance with the course
- Supporting SOAR-trained case managers

Building Resiliency in Native Communities

- Social Security Disability Benefits can be a crucial source of income for American Indian and Alaska Native individuals living in urban, rural, or reservation-based communities.
- SOAR can provide timely access to SSI/SSDI, which in turn brings income into the local community, helps secure stable housing and increases employment opportunities for beneficiaries.



SSA's Commitment to Native Communities

- 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

<https://www.socialsecurity.gov/people/aian>

New Resources!

SOAR WORKS

SSI/SSDI Eligibility FAQs for American Indians and Alaska Natives

Q: Are American Indians and Alaska Natives eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits?

Yes! American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) may be eligible for SSI and/or SSDI benefits if they meet the non-medical and medical eligibility requirements. Status as AI/AN does not preclude someone from receiving Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits. You can find more information about SSA's AI/AN services at <https://www.ssa.gov/people/ai/ian/>.

Q: Are American Indian and Alaska Native children (under the age of 18) eligible for SSI?

Yes, AI/AN children experiencing disabling health conditions such as developmental disabilities, serious mental illness, trauma, and/or medical issues may qualify for SSI if they meet SSA's medical and non-medical eligibility criteria. Access to income and health insurance can help improve the entire family's stability by helping the family meet its basic needs, gain access to treatment, and build resiliency during the recovery process. You can find more information about SSI for Children at <https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/text-child-sssi.htm>.

Q: How can American Indians and Alaska Natives who are living on reservations or native lands or within urban areas access SSA services? There are several ways to contact the Social Security Administration (SSA):

- By phone (toll-free): 1-800-772-1214
- Online: <https://www.ssa.gov/>
- Use the online locator to find a Social Security office near you¹
- Video Service Delivery (VSD) Centers have been set up in some communities. At a VSD Center, an applicant can use the video phone to see and talk to an SSA employee²

Q: What is SSA doing to collaborate with tribal governments?

SSA established a formal consultation process with tribal governments in 2001. The Deputy Commissioner of Operations serves as the Tribal Consultation Official and liaison with federally recognized tribal governments. SSA annually reviews its regulatory agenda and legislative submissions to determine if any proposals have tribal implications. The 2020 Tribal Consultation Progress Report, which describes all of SSA's ongoing communication, education and outreach activities, can be found on their website.³

Q: If an American Indian or Alaska Native individual is receiving SSI and also receives an annual cash allotment from his or her tribe, does it need to be reported to SSA?

Yes. Because SSI is needs-based, SSA considers an applicant's earned and unearned income. If an SSI beneficiary receives an annual cash allotment from his or her tribe, it should be reported

1 SSA Field Office Locator: <https://secure.ssa.gov/ICOM/main.jsp>
2 SSA Video Service Delivery Locations, by Region: https://www.ssa.gov/open/maps/ai/ian_details.html
3 Tribal Consultation and Coordination Plan: <https://www.ssa.gov/people/ai/ian/materials/pdf/tri/tribal-con-plan.pdf>



Medical Summary Report Interview Guide and Template for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

The *Medical Summary Report (MSR) Interview Guide* provides sample questions and guidance for gathering information necessary to the SSI/SSDI disability determination process. We do not expect you to ask all of the questions in each section. The questions are intended to help you gather all of the information you will need to write a Medical Summary Report. For example, if the individual has not been in military service, there is no need to include a military history section. Likewise, if the individual has no legal issues, do not include a legal history section.

Using this guidance, SOAR-trained providers are able to gather a thorough history in a respectful manner, which in turn helps the Disability Determination Services (DDS) understand the duration of a person's impairment and the effect of their illness(es) on work ability and functioning. The *MSR Template* may be used to compile information in the form of a narrative letter to SSA/DDS as part of the SOAR process. The template has eight main sections, covering the types of information that DDS needs to make a decision. Use the headings provided in the template to organize your MSR.

Trauma-Informed Interviewing

How questions are asked can be critical to obtaining the appropriate information. It is important to be sensitive to influences that affect a person's ability and willingness to provide information (cultural factors, past experiences with the mental health system, etc.). The interviewing process can also uncover sensitive topics like past and current trauma that need to be approached with care. When asking about trauma, it is critical to not overwhelm the applicant. It is equally important that the person be safe and secure after leaving the interview. Gathering such personal information requires a sensitive and skilled interviewer.



SOAR Tip: Interviewers who feel uncomfortable or ill-equipped to explore certain topics should not do so. Instead, they should seek assistance from someone who is more clinically skilled and more able to assess responses, to ensure that the person is safe from self-harm and/or emotional distress when the interview ends.

SOAR WORKS

Implementing State and Local SOAR Initiatives in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

State, Local, and Tribal Leads spearhead and coordinate the implementation of SOAR initiatives. These leaders identify and engage stakeholders to participate in steering committees whose goal is to create and implement a SOAR action plan to support adult and child applications for Social Security disability benefits. These committees meet regularly to collaborate, report on progress, and troubleshoot challenges.

Introduce SOAR to Your Community

- Identify and engage state, local, and tribal agencies and stakeholders to participate in your community's SOAR initiative. Educate and inform them about the purpose and benefits of SOAR for individuals in your community with disabilities.
- Offer SOAR Orientation presentations for tribal and organizational leadership and direct service providers.
- Attend existing community meetings and share information about the importance and impact of SOAR.

Train and Support Staff That Assist Adult SSI/SSDI and/or Child SSI Applicants

- Identify programs and organizations within your community that are currently assisting adults, children, and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness with Social Security disability applications. Explore reallocation of existing resources to incorporate fully or partially dedicated SOAR benefits specialists.
- Identify staff to complete the SOAR Online Course: Adult and/or Child Curriculum. Provide guidance throughout and following the training. Inform trainees of any state/local/tribal-specific processes.
- Establish quality review procedures to assess fidelity to the SOAR model and ensure that applications are complete and high quality. Get feedback from SSA/DDS on SOAR-assisted applications they are receiving.

Collaborate, Coordinate, and Communicate

- *Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS):* Negotiate a SOAR Process for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) adult SSI/SSDI and child SSI application submission. Identify SSA/DDS SOAR liaisons in local and tribal offices.
- *Medical Providers:* Identify medical providers who can provide physical/psychiatric evaluations and co-sign Medical Summary Reports. Explore using retroactive Medicaid to reimburse for medical evaluations. Set up a process to obtain medical records, free of charge if possible.
- *Other Collaborations:* Think broadly! Include tribal administrators, school leadership, vocational service providers, Tribal Indian Child Welfare departments, tribal family services, tribal economic support, housing agencies, jails/prisons, Veteran services, and representative payee services.

Track and Report Outcomes

- Identify tracking mechanism to be used—e.g., SOAR Online Application Tracking System.
- Establish procedures for the reporting of outcomes by communities and SOAR-trained staff.
- Report outcomes to the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center as requested.

Fund and Sustain

- Use your outcomes to expand or sustain your SOAR initiative.
- Educate stakeholders, influential tribal leaders, tribal social service leadership, tribal grant offices, and potential funders about the impact SOAR has in your tribal community. Share success stories; report on cost savings (reimbursement/recoupment totals).
- Explore various funding sources. Consider use of federal funds (e.g., PATH, CABH), Systems of Care; pool and/or realign existing resources; explore AI/AN organizations and community foundations, United Way, corporations, and hospital collaborations; and investigate criminal or juvenile justice funding to implement SOAR in jails, prisons, or detention facilities.

Stephanie Winker

**Social Security Administration, Office of Hearings
Operations, Online Video Hearings**



THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

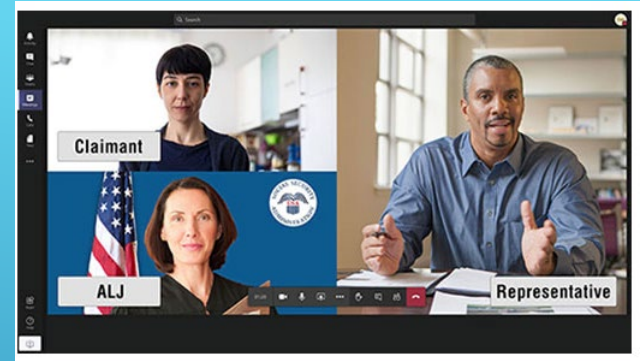
OFFICE OF HEARINGS OPERATIONS

ONLINE VIDEO HEARINGS

- Social Security Applicants at the ALJ hearing level can now attend an online video hearing using Microsoft Teams.
- Claimants can attend their hearing from any private space using a smartphone, tablet, or computer.
- This allows convenience while still providing face-to-face time with the ALJ.
- OHO is reaching out to communities to enhance accessibility to video hearings for those with housing issues, claimants in rural areas, and those who do not have access to reliable internet.

WOULD YOU LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

- SSA is happy to send you a publication that your Tribal Resource Coordinators, Health Clinics, or Human Services can distribute.
- Check out our website with a Teams User Guide, DAQs, and more:
https://www.ssa.gov/appeals/hearing_video.html
- Watch our Video on Demand for a demonstration of an Online Video Hearing: <https://youtu.be/fecQ9grmtJM> (or search SSA Online Video Hearings- Introduction)
- Have questions? Reach out to the Office of Hearings Operations Regional Office:
OHO/R8.R10.Outreach.Program@SSA.Gov



ONE MORE THING!

THE FCC BROADBAND BENEFIT

- The FCC is introducing an emergency broadband benefit program that provides \$50 per eligible household towards broadband services. This benefit is increased to \$75 per month for households on Tribal lands.
- Eligible households may also receive a one time discount of up to \$100 on the purchase of a laptop, computer, or tablet.
- Opening date not established but expected late spring. Go to <https://www.fcc.broadbandbenefit> for announcements and for more details about qualifications.



What's Next?

- Review the SOARWorks website:
 - Starting Your SOAR Initiative:
<https://soarworks.prainc.com/article/starting-your-soar-initiative>
 - SOAR Online Course Catalog:
<https://soarworks.prainc.com/content/soar-online-course-catalog>
 - SSI/SSDI Eligibility for American Indians and Alaska Natives:
<https://soarworks.prainc.com/article/ssi-ssdi-aian>
- Reach out to Abby Kirkman (akirkman@prainc.com) or your SAMHSA SOAR TA Center Liaison (<https://soarworks.prainc.com/content/contact-us>) if you are interested in learning more about SOAR!

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)