

SOAR Partners

In 2002, *ending chronic homelessness* was identified as a goal of the Administration. In response to this goal, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) partnered with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) to fund nine *Homeless Policy Academies* that were designed to bring together state-level program administrators and homeless service providers in order to develop state-specific action plans designed to increase access to mainstream resources for persons experiencing homelessness. Through the Policy Academy process, an increasing number of States requested training on accessing Social Security benefits (SSI/SSDI) for eligible homeless individuals in their state.

In late 2004, SAMHSA had completed the *Stepping Stones to Recovery* (SSR) manual and training curriculum designed to help case managers assist homeless people to apply for SSA disability benefits. The training curriculum, entitled SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery, the SOAR Initiative, provides an overview of SSA's disability programs, plus a step-by-step guide to completing the application process with persons experiencing homelessness. States were invited to apply to take part in the Stepping Stones to Recovery training, and a Federal interagency review group comprised of representatives of HHS (HRSA, SAMHSA, CMS, and OS/ASPE), HUD, DOL, and SSA met to review and rank all applications. In 2006, an additional round of funding became available to support additional states to be trained on the Stepping Stones curriculum, and the same Federal interagency review group was reconstituted to review the second batch of applications from interested states. In June of 2007, SAMHSA and HUD announced the availability of funds to support an additional ten states to participate in the SOAR Initiative. A total of thirty-four states and two communities have now participated in the SOAR Initiative.

As interest in the SOAR Initiative grows, additional states, communities, and groups are interested in participating in the initiative. In an effort to better understand the process and outcomes of the training and technical assistance provided under SOAR, several agencies within HHS (HRSA, SAMHSA, and OS/ASPE) are collaborating on this focus group activity. Key staff involved in this project are listed below.

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