

NM SOAR NEWSLETTER

Issue 6

June 2011

New Mexico SOAR Participates in National Evaluation

In May 2011, NM was one of 13 states selected to participate in the National Evaluation of SOAR. The evaluation is being conducted by Mathematica Policy Research. The primary goals of the evaluation are to document the federal government's investment in SOAR and to assess the effectiveness of providing states with technical assistance to improve SSI/SSDI application outcomes for individuals who are homeless. Mathematica will collect data for the evaluation through site visits to SOAR communities, from Social Security Administration files, and from the SOAR Data Tracking System.

Patrick Halsmer is the NM SOAR State lead and the SOAR Data Liaison. He'll be working with Mathematica for the duration of this evaluation period, which may last through November 2013. In New Mexico, Albuquerque was selected as the site for the evaluation.

Mathematica is already planning its first site visit to New Mexico. The evaluation team will be in Albuquerque July 18-19, 2011. They will be meeting with as many of the people involved in SOAR as they can in their 2 days: SOAR providers/representatives, SOAR trainers, Directors of SOAR agencies, hospitals, Social Security, Disability Determination Services, and the Co-Chairs and members of the NM SOAR Steering Committee.

One of the main tools Mathematica will be using is the collection of SOAR data from the 13 states through the SOAR Data Tracking System. This is a data program developed specifically for SOAR. The data program is HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) compliant and prevents the disclosure of any of the client's Protected Health Information. What it does track in detail is a SOAR client's progress through the SSI/SSDI application proc-

ess from the initial Protective Filing Date through the results of the last appeal. As NM's SOAR Data Liaison, Patrick will be reporting this data into Mathematica on a monthly basis for the evaluation period.

In 2012, maybe about this same time next year, Mathematica will conduct another site visit to Albuquerque. By then they will have about a year's worth of NM SOAR data. They will be in a position to provide us with more valuable feedback on our progress with SOAR. As we move on towards 2013, the final year of the Evaluation, we're confident that the data will confirm SOAR to be a wise investment from the federal and the state perspectives.

New group for SOAR representatives starts

At our SOAR refresher training in March, SOAR reps told us that they would like to meet monthly with each other to discuss their successes and challenges with SOAR, and to have an opportunity to problem-solve together.

Patrick Halsmer began offering these monthly meetings in May. In order to accommodate people's busy schedules and our SOAR reps who are outside Albuquerque, Patrick is coordinating two different groups. Both groups

meet the last Wednesday of each month, but at different times:

- From 11am - 12pm, there is a SOAR conference call, where SOAR reps can talk to each other and Patrick via phone. Patrick will facilitate this conversation.
- From 12pm - 1pm, SOAR representatives will have the option of meeting in person at Patrick's office, which is located at the SW Income Support Division office in

Albuquerque.

Patrick will send out an email with reminders and directions/call-in information prior to each meeting.

We decided to hold these meetings on the same day as the monthly SOAR Steering Committee meetings, so that any concerns, challenges or successes raised at these monthly meetings can be shared immediately with the Steering Committee.

NM SOAR expands outcomes tracking

When we think of SOAR activities, we most often think of the more intense personal interactions with our SOAR clients. We remember individuals. We think about the very difficult challenges they face. We think about how much time and work it takes to collect all their information for a successful SOAR application. When we think of SOAR, probably the last thing we think about is "data".

Since we began NM SOAR implementation in April 2009, all of the SOAR representatives have been tracking their own data on their own clients. Now, NM SOAR is in the process of coordinating and standardizing all its SOAR data tracking and reporting from around the state. We'll be using the SOAR Data Tracking Program, designed specifically for SOAR.

We'll track when an application or appeal began, how a client was represented, what kinds of supporting materials were submitted, how long it took to reach a decision, the results of the decision, the appeal of denials, the results of appeals, and the number of days each one of these processes took. Over time this information will begin to show how effective SOAR is at increasing the SSI/SSDI approval rate for homeless applicants. It will show how SOAR can reduce the number of days required to achieve the increased approvals.

Usually, SOAR providers would be asked to report their data to the NM SOAR Data Liaison quarterly. However, NM SOAR is one of 13 states currently participating in the National Evaluation of SOAR. The evaluation period may extend through November 2013, and it asks participating states to report data monthly. So, for the duration of the evaluation period, Albuquerque SOAR providers will be asked to report their SOAR data monthly.

So this spring and summer of 2011 our focus is on our NM SOAR data. It's probably not all that exciting for most people. For a lot of us all the talk about data can even be intimidating. Still, this is an opportunity for us to demonstrate SOAR's positive impact in our community when we're all looking for the most cost effective way to use our limited resources.