SOAR WORKS

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Identifying SOAR Applicants

SOAR FOR CHILDREN

This tool is intended to help case workers identify children (ages 0-17) who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness who may be eligible for the Social Security Administration's Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. While SSA does not want to discourage a child, by and through their parent/caregiver, or an unaccompanied youth from applying for SSI benefits, this tool should help you identify children that most need your assistance with their application.

Assessing Eligibility

SSI benefits are available to children under the age of 18 who have "a medically determinable physical or mental impairment, which results in marked and severe functional limitations, and 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."

A child's impairment must meet or medically equal one of SSA's listings, or functionally equal the listings. To make this determination, SSA will review the child's medical and educational records, as well as evidence from community sources to evaluate how the child's functional abilities compare to the functional abilities of a child of the same age who does not have a physical or mental impairment.

The key eligibility criteria listed below is intended to help identify children who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness who may be eligible for SSI benefits.

Children's SSI Key Medical Eligibility Criteria

The following characteristics represent key medical eligibility criteria for SSA childhood disability benefits.

- Child has a serious mental and/or physical illness, or combination of illnesses.
- The illnesses or conditions have lasted or are expected to last for at least 12 months or are expected to result in death.
- For children with mental illness, they have documentation of medical criteria and marked limitation of two, or extreme limitation of one of the following areas of mental functioning:
    - Understand, remember, or apply information (examples include understanding and learning terms, instructions, or procedures; identifying and solving problems)
    - Interact with others (examples include cooperating with others; keeping social interactions free of excessive irritability, sensitivity, argumentativeness, or suspiciousness.)
    - Concentrate, persist, or maintain pace (examples include initiating and performing an activity that the child understands and knows how to do; changing activities without being disruptive)
    - Adapt or manage oneself (examples include maintaining personal hygiene; adapting to changes)

- For children with physical or mental health conditions, they struggle to do things on a day-to-day basis that other children their age who do not have impairments typically do in the following six broad domains of functioning:
    - Acquiring and using information (learning and using new information)
    - Attending and completing tasks (focusing and maintaining attention, keeping pace in carrying out tasks)
    - Interacting and relating with others (initiating and sustaining emotional connections with others, cooperating with others, complying with rules, responding to criticism, and taking care of possessions)
    - Moving about and manipulating objects (considering the development of gross and fine motor skills)
    - Caring for themselves (personal care, including both physical and emotional health, coping with stress and a changing environment)
    - Health and physical well-being (cumulative physical effects of physical or mental impairments and their associated treatment or therapies on the child's functioning)

Children's SSI Key Non-Medical Eligibility Criteria

The following characteristics represent key non-medical eligibility criteria for SSA childhood disability benefits.

- Child is not currently working and earning over $1,620/month (substantial gainful activity (SGA) for 2025).
- The child's parent(s) have limited income and resources if the child is living with their parents. *(Note: Some income may be excluded when determining non-medical eligibility. Questions should be directed to the local SSA Field Office.)*

SOAR Recommends

The following characteristics are not essential but may strengthen an application.

- Child is prescribed psychiatric medications and continues to experience symptoms and functional impairments.
- Child has obtainable medical and non-medical evidence (e.g., school records, Individualized Education Program (IEP), 504 accommodations, hospital records) that corroborates mental illness and medical complaints.
- If there is limited medical evidence or large gaps in treatment:
    - Child clearly exhibits symptoms severe enough that a one-time examination by a physician would demonstrate issues.
    - Representative can write a Medical Summary Report that details symptoms and functional impairments that demonstrate diagnosed disability.
    - Interviews and statements are available from all persons in a caregiving role.
- Child receives more help than a child of the same age without an impairment would need.
- Child receiving special education and/or early intervention services and needs accommodations at school or home.
- Child needs a structured or supportive setting.
- Child lives or has lived for a period of time in a residential facility or school.