

Definitions of Homelessness used by SOAR and SSA

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) initiative is intended for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness. These terms are defined differently by SOAR and the Social Security Administration (SSA). It is important for SOAR providers to understand these differences when determining who meets the housing criteria to be a SOAR applicant and which cases can be expedited at SSA through the use of the “homeless flag.”

SOAR Homelessness and At Risk of Homelessness Definitions

The SOAR model follows the definitions of “homeless” and “at risk of homelessness” used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The statutory language of these definitions is derived from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009.

The definition of those who are **experiencing homelessness** includes:

1. An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, such as those living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or places not meant for habitation, **or**
2. An individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence (within 14 days), provided that no subsequent housing has been identified and the individual/family lacks support networks or resources needed to obtain housing, **or**
3. Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth who qualify as homeless under other Federal statutes, such as the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act; have not had a lease or ownership interest in a housing unit in the last 60 or more days, have had two or more moves in the last 60 days, and who are likely to continue to be unstably housed because of disability or multiple barriers to employment, **or**
4. An individual or family who is fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, has no other residence, and lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing

The definition of those who are **at risk of homelessness** includes individuals and families who:

1. Have an annual income below 30 percent of median family income for the area, as determined by HUD, **and**
2. Do not have sufficient resources or support networks immediately available to prevent them from moving to an emergency shelter or place not meant for habitation, **and**
3. Exhibit one or more risk factors of homelessness, including recent housing instability or exiting a publically funded institution or system of care such as foster care, mental health facility, or correctional institution

SOAR is also appropriate for individuals who are being served by U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH), Housing First, and other Permanent Supportive

Housing for those who were recently experiencing homelessness and who are relying on grant support or have limited income to sustain their housing.

SSA Homelessness Definitions

The SSA definition of homelessness is more closely aligned to literal homelessness. Applicants who meet the criteria below will receive expedited processing at SSA through the use of a “homeless flag” on their electronic application.

Homeless or Transient (Living Arrangement): An individual with no permanent living arrangement, i.e., no fixed place of residence, is considered homeless or transient. Someone who is transient is neither a member of a household nor a resident of an institution. For example:

- Someone who sleeps in doorways, overnight shelters, parks, bus stations, etc.
- A person who stays with a succession of friends or relatives and has no permanent living arrangement on the first moment of the month
- Source: <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/poms.nsf/lnx/0500835060>

Homeless Flag (Electronic Folder Flag): The homeless flag is added to the electronic folder when it is alleged or apparent that the claimant is homeless.

- SSA’s Homeless Flag is only applicable to those who meet its definition of homelessness, and not for those who are at risk of homelessness
- Source: <https://secure.ssa.gov/poms.nsf/lnx/0411005004>

NOTE: Not all SOAR cases will be given the SSA electronic homeless flag, but applications that meet the SOAR definition of homelessness or at risk of homelessness above can be marked as SOAR in the “Remarks” section of the electronic application.