

Central City Concern's Benefits and Entitlement Specialist Team (BEST) Program

Homelessness is an extreme and often lethal social determinant of health. Approximately 17,000 individuals are estimated to be homeless in Multnomah County each year.¹ A conservative 39% are estimated to be eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Medicaid based on their mental illness and 46% based on their physical health conditions, but **only 11% receive these benefits.**² Given the multiple chronic health conditions leading to and resulting from homelessness, acquisition of benefits and entitlements for these most vulnerable citizens is critical. It provides them access to the continuous and comprehensive healthcare and supported services needed to stabilize and improve health outcomes and promotes eventual self-sufficiency.

Using evidence-based practices, BEST assists those with disabilities to expedite acquisition of federal benefits and entitlements (SSI/DI and Medicaid/Medicare). With those benefits, they may then access the comprehensive and specialized health and behavioral healthcare, supported housing and other services they need to stabilize their conditions and become more self-sufficient.

The BEST team utilizes well-established protocols created by the federal SOAR initiative. (LINK TO SOAR <http://www.prainc.com/soar/>) Benefits specialists, a records/data coordinator, and a physician work with the local Social Security Administration (SSA) office to expedite applications for disability. The physician conducts the disability evaluations required by the Disability Determination Services division of Oregon.

It is expected that the program will shorten the SSA processing time from an average of 2.5 years in Oregon in 2007 to 4-6 months from application to award. Additionally, it is expected to increase the rate of awards approved on initial application from 15% to 60%.

Funding partners:

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¹ Home Again: A 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Portland and Multnomah County, 12/04,

² GAO Study, 2000