



VA Homebuyer Guide



ELIGIBILITY • ENTITLEMENT • FUNDING FEE • VA APPRAISAL



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VA Homebuyer Guide

Eligibility, the Certificate of Eligibility, entitlement, the funding fee, the VA appraisal, occupancy, and the purchase process — explained plainly.

A VA loan is a mortgage made by a private lender and partially guaranteed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. That guaranty is what allows lenders to offer eligible service members, veterans, and certain surviving spouses financing that may require no down payment and that charges no monthly mortgage insurance. Eligibility is confirmed through a Certificate of Eligibility, but eligibility is not approval: credit, income, residual income, the property, the appraisal, occupancy, title, and full underwriting still determine whether a loan closes.

Key takeaways

- The VA guarantees part of the loan; a private lender makes it and sets its own credit and underwriting overlays.
- A Certificate of Eligibility confirms entitlement. It does not confirm approval, price, or terms.
- Zero down payment is possible for many eligible borrowers, but entitlement, price, appraisal, and lender guidelines can all change that.
- The VA funding fee is a one-time fee, not mortgage insurance, and some borrowers are exempt.
- A VA appraisal reviews value and minimum property requirements. It is not a substitute for a home inspection.
- VA financing is for a primary residence; investment-only use is generally not permitted.

Who this guide is for

- Active-duty service members and veterans buying a home
- National Guard and Reserve members exploring the benefit
- Eligible surviving spouses
- Military families relocating on PCS orders
- Repeat VA users and borrowers considering an IRRRL or VA cash-out refinance

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1. What is a VA loan?

A VA loan is a mortgage originated by a private lender — a bank, credit union, or mortgage company — that carries a partial guaranty from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA does not directly make most VA purchase mortgages. It sets program rules and stands behind a portion of the loan if the borrower defaults, which reduces the lender's loss exposure.

That guaranty is the entire reason the benefit exists in the form it does. Because part of the lender's risk is covered, VA financing has historically been able to offer eligible borrowers features that are unusual elsewhere: the possibility of no down payment, no monthly mortgage insurance, and limits on certain fees a veteran may be charged.

The most common misunderstanding is that eligibility equals approval. It does not. A Certificate of Eligibility tells a lender that you have entitlement available. Whether a specific loan closes depends on your credit history, income and its stability, residual income, assets, the property itself, the VA appraisal, clear title, occupancy intent, and the lender's complete underwriting review.

The benefit is also reusable. It is not a one-time program, and it is not restricted to first-time buyers. Many households use VA financing several times across a career.

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2. Who may be eligible?

Eligibility is based on service. In general terms, the categories the VA recognizes include active-duty service members, veterans, members of the National Guard and Reserve, and certain surviving spouses of service members. Within each category, the VA looks at length of service, the period during which service occurred, and character of service.

Because the service requirements differ by era, by component, and by discharge characterization — and because the VA updates them — this guide does not restate specific month or day thresholds. Publishing a number that later changes would be worse than publishing none. The authoritative source is the VA's own eligibility material, and your Certificate of Eligibility is the definitive confirmation for a particular borrower.

Surviving spouses are a category worth calling out, because it is frequently overlooked. Certain surviving spouses of service members who died in service or from a service-connected disability may be eligible, and in some cases the funding fee is not charged. Eligibility in this category has its own documentation path.

If you are unsure whether you qualify, the practical first step is not a guess — it is requesting the Certificate of Eligibility, which is free.

Service categories the VA recognizes, in broad terms

- ☐ Active-duty service members currently serving
- ☐ Veterans who have separated or retired
- ☐ National Guard members
- ☐ Reserve members
- ☐ Certain surviving spouses
- ☐ Some other limited categories of service recognized by the VA

Length-of-service and character-of-service requirements are set by the VA and change over time. Confirm your specific situation through the VA or a VA-experienced lender rather than relying on any summary, including this one.

3. What is a Certificate of Eligibility?

The Certificate of Eligibility, almost always called the COE, is the document that confirms to a lender that you have VA home-loan entitlement and how much of it is available. It is the gate through which every VA loan passes.

A COE can generally be obtained online through the VA's benefits portal, through a VA-approved lender who can request it electronically on your behalf, or by mail using the VA's application form. Most borrowers working with an experienced lender never touch the process directly — the lender pulls it during pre-qualification, often in minutes.

What supports the request depends on your status. Active-duty service members typically provide a current statement of service. Veterans typically provide discharge documentation, most commonly the DD-214. National Guard and Reserve members provide their own service documentation. Surviving spouses have a separate documentation path.

The COE will show whether you have full entitlement or a reduced amount, and whether a prior VA loan is still charged against your benefit. It will also show your funding-fee status, including whether the VA records indicate an exemption.

Read your COE. Borrowers who assume their entitlement is fully restored — after a sale, a refinance, or an assumption — and discover otherwise at underwriting have usually skipped that one step.

Getting your COE

- ☐ Ask your lender to request the COE electronically during pre-qualification
- ☐ Or request it yourself through the VA's online benefits portal
- ☐ Active duty: have a current statement of service available
- ☐ Veterans: have your DD-214 or equivalent discharge documentation
- ☐ Guard and Reserve: have your service and points documentation
- ☐ Surviving spouses: expect a separate documentation path
- ☐ Review the entitlement amount and funding-fee status shown on the certificate

4. How VA entitlement works

Entitlement is the dollar amount of the VA's guaranty available to back your loan. It is the mechanism behind almost everything people find confusing about VA loans, including why one borrower can buy with nothing down and another with the same service history cannot.

Basic entitlement is the baseline amount the VA will guarantee. Beyond that, there is an additional tier of entitlement that applies to larger loan amounts. Together they are what lenders are referring to when they say a borrower has 'full entitlement.'

Full entitlement generally means you have never used the benefit, or you used it and it has been fully restored. Borrowers with full entitlement typically have the widest access to no-down-payment financing, subject to the lender's own guidelines and the appraised value.

Remaining or partial entitlement applies when a prior VA loan is still outstanding, or when a prior loan was not fully restored. Partial entitlement does not prevent you from using the benefit again — many borrowers buy a second home on remaining entitlement — but a down payment may be required, and the calculation depends on the amount already in use and the loan amount you need.

Restoration is the process of freeing up entitlement previously used. It commonly follows the sale and payoff of a VA-financed property, a refinance out of VA financing, or a one-time restoration available in specific circumstances. Restoration is not automatic in every case and may require a request.

Assumption changes the picture in a way that surprises sellers. If an eligible buyer assumes your VA loan and substitutes their entitlement, yours can generally be restored. If the buyer is not using VA entitlement, your entitlement may remain tied to that loan until it is paid off — even though you no longer own the property.

Entitlement math is specific to your COE, your outstanding VA loans, the county, and the loan amount requested. Any general example is illustrative only; ask a VA-experienced lender to run your actual numbers from your actual COE.

5. Down payment: what 'zero down' really means

Eligible borrowers with full entitlement may be able to finance a purchase with no down payment. That is genuinely the headline feature of the program, and for many military families it is the difference between buying and continuing to rent.

It is not universal. A down payment may still be required or advisable when entitlement is partial, when the purchase price exceeds the appraised value, when the loan amount is large relative to available entitlement, when the lender applies its own guidelines, or when a borrower chooses to put money down to reduce the payment or the funding fee.

The appraisal matters here. VA financing is based on the appraised value. If a property appraises below the contract price, the difference is generally not financed — it is renegotiated, covered in cash, or the contract is cancelled under an appropriate contingency.

Down payment is also not the same as cash to close. Closing costs, prepaid items, escrow deposits for taxes and insurance, and in some cases the funding fee are separate. A borrower can be a genuine zero-down buyer and still need meaningful funds at the table.

Seller concessions and lender credits can reduce that cash requirement, but both are subject to limits and to how the transaction is structured. Whether a seller will agree is a negotiation, not a program feature.

Cash you may need even with no down payment

- ☐ Earnest money deposit at contract
- ☐ Home inspection and any specialty inspections you order
- ☐ Appraisal fee, where charged upfront
- ☐ Closing costs and lender fees permitted under VA rules
- ☐ Prepaid interest, homeowners insurance, and flood insurance where applicable
- ☐ Escrow deposits for property taxes and insurance
- ☐ The funding fee, if you choose to pay it in cash rather than finance it
- ☐ Moving costs and immediate post-closing expenses

6. The VA funding fee

The funding fee is a one-time fee paid to the VA on most VA loans. Its purpose is to help sustain the program for future service members and veterans, reducing the cost to taxpayers. It is charged at closing and, where allowed, may be financed into the loan amount rather than paid in cash.

The funding fee is not mortgage insurance. This distinction matters financially. Mortgage insurance on many other programs is a recurring monthly charge that continues until specific conditions are met. The VA funding fee is a single charge tied to the transaction. VA loans do not carry monthly mortgage insurance.

The amount charged is not the same for every borrower. Broadly, it can vary based on whether it is your first use of the benefit or a subsequent use, the type of transaction, and the size of any down payment. A larger down payment generally reduces the fee.

Some borrowers are exempt. Exemptions commonly relate to service-connected disability compensation status and to certain surviving spouses. Your COE reflects the VA's record of exemption status, which is one more reason to read it. If your status changes — for example, a disability rating is awarded after closing — there may be a path to a refund of a fee already paid.

This guide does not publish current funding-fee percentages. The VA sets and periodically revises them, and a stale percentage in a downloadable PDF is a genuine risk to a borrower's planning. Ask for your actual fee in writing on your Loan Estimate.

Funding-fee percentages, exemption criteria, and financing rules are set by the VA and change. Confirm the exact fee that applies to your transaction on your Loan Estimate and Closing Disclosure.

7. The VA appraisal

Every VA purchase loan requires an appraisal performed by an appraiser assigned through the VA. The appraiser has two jobs: establish a reasonable value for the property and review it against the VA's minimum property requirements.

Minimum property requirements exist to protect the borrower and the guaranty. They center on three ideas often summarized as safety, soundness, and sanitation: the home should be safe to live in, structurally sound, and sanitary. In practice, appraisers flag items like exposed wiring, active roof leaks, missing handrails where required, non-functioning mechanical systems, standing water in a crawlspace, or an inoperable water supply.

A VA appraisal is not a home inspection. It is a lender-driven valuation with a property-condition overlay. It does not test every system, it does not scope sewer lines, and it does not guarantee that the home has no defects. Ordering an independent home inspection remains one of the highest-value few hundred dollars a buyer spends.

When an appraiser anticipates that value may come in below the contract price, the VA's Tidewater process gives the listing side an opportunity to submit additional market data before the report is finalized. Time windows are short, which is why VA-experienced agents matter.

If the completed appraisal still comes in low, a Reconsideration of Value may be requested, generally supported by comparable sales the appraiser did not consider. It is a documented process, not an appeal based on disappointment.

Where repairs are required, they are typically completed before closing. Who pays is a negotiation between buyer and seller, and there are limits on what a VA borrower may be charged.

VA appraisal versus home inspection

	VA appraisal	Home inspection
Ordered by	The lender, through VA assignment	You, the buyer
Primary purpose	Value plus minimum property requirements	Condition of the home for your decision
Scope	Observable items relevant to value and MPRs	Broad systems and components review
Who it protects	The lender and the VA guaranty	You
Optional?	No, required for VA financing	Optional, and strongly recommended

8. Occupancy rules

VA financing is intended for a home the borrower will occupy as a primary residence. This is the reason a VA loan cannot be used simply to buy a rental property. The benefit exists to house service members and veterans, not to fund an investment portfolio.

The VA expects occupancy within a reasonable time after closing. Circumstances that make immediate occupancy impractical — an active duty station elsewhere, a pending separation date, a home requiring repairs — are handled through documented certifications rather than assumptions.

Spousal occupancy can satisfy the requirement in many active-duty situations. When a service member is deployed or stationed away, a spouse occupying the home may meet the intent of the rule. Documentation is required, and treatment varies by scenario.

Multi-unit properties are permitted in defined circumstances where the borrower occupies one of the units. That is the one place where VA financing and rental income legitimately meet: the veteran lives in the property, and other units may be rented.

Occupancy can change legitimately over time. Buying with genuine intent to occupy, living in the home, and later relocating on orders is a normal life sequence. What the rules address is intent at the time of the loan — not a promise to never move.

Occupancy certifications, timelines, deployment provisions, and multi-unit rules are program-specific and documented case by case. Discuss your circumstances with a VA-experienced lender before you write an offer.

9. Residual income: the VA's distinctive test

Residual income is the amount of money a household has left each month after the mortgage payment, other debt obligations, estimated taxes, and certain maintenance and utility estimates are subtracted from gross income. It is one of the more thoughtful features of VA underwriting, and it is largely unique to the program.

The idea is simple and well grounded: two households with identical debt-to-income ratios can be in very different financial positions. A family of five in a high-cost area with a 40% DTI is not in the same place as a single borrower with the same ratio. Residual income asks whether there is realistically enough money left to live.

The VA's guidelines vary by household size and by geographic region, recognizing that the cost of living is not uniform across the country. This guide does not publish a single universal minimum, because there is no such thing — the figures are tabled by region and family size and are updated by the VA.

Residual income is not a replacement for DTI; it sits alongside it. In many files it is also a compensating factor: a borrower with a higher DTI but strong residual income may present a stronger overall profile than the ratio alone would suggest.

Residual income compared with debt-to-income

	Residual income	Debt-to-income ratio
What it measures	Dollars remaining after obligations	Obligations as a percentage of income
Accounts for household size	Yes	No
Accounts for region	Yes	No
Includes utility and maintenance estimates	Typically yes	No
Used by	VA underwriting	Most mortgage programs

10. Credit and debt-to-income

The VA does not publish a universal minimum credit score for the program. What exists in practice are lender overlays: individual lenders set their own minimum scores, and those minimums differ meaningfully from one lender to another. A borrower declined by one VA lender is not necessarily ineligible for VA financing.

Credit review goes beyond the score. Underwriters look at payment history, the recency and severity of derogatory events, the amount and type of outstanding debt, recent credit inquiries

and new accounts, and whether any explanation of a past event is documented and reasonable.

Debt-to-income is reviewed in context. Because VA underwriting also weighs residual income, compensating factors, and the overall risk profile, a DTI figure that would be treated as a hard stop elsewhere may be reviewed differently in a VA file — or may not be, depending on the lender.

Past hardship is not automatically disqualifying. Bankruptcy, foreclosure, and short sale have seasoning considerations that vary by event type, program, and lender. Re-established credit and a documented explanation matter.

The practical advice is unglamorous: pull your own credit early, dispute genuine errors, keep balances stable, and stop opening new accounts once you are within a few months of applying.

Credit score minimums, seasoning periods after derogatory events, and DTI treatment are lender- and investor-specific. Requirements described here are general and are not a commitment to lend.

11. The VA purchase process, step by step

The sequence below is the typical path from interest to keys. Timelines vary with market conditions, appraisal availability, and how quickly conditions are satisfied.

From eligibility to closing

- ☐ Confirm eligibility and understand your service documentation
- ☐ Obtain your Certificate of Eligibility and review entitlement and fee status
- ☐ Estimate your buying power and monthly payment before you shop
- ☐ Get pre-qualified with a VA-experienced lender and review your Loan Estimate
- ☐ Select a real estate professional who has closed VA transactions
- ☐ Identify a property and confirm it is likely to meet minimum property requirements
- ☐ Execute a purchase contract with appropriate appraisal and financing contingencies
- ☐ Order an independent home inspection
- ☐ Lender orders the VA appraisal
- ☐ Submit documentation and complete underwriting
- ☐ Satisfy underwriting conditions promptly and completely
- ☐ Review the Closing Disclosure and compare it with your Loan Estimate
- ☐ Complete the final walkthrough
- ☐ Close, and confirm wire instructions by phone with a known number before sending any funds

12. VA loan assumptions

A VA loan may be assumable, which means a qualified buyer can take over the existing loan, including its interest rate and remaining term. In a market where rates have risen since the loan was originated, that feature has real value.

Assumption is not informal. It generally requires approval by the lender or servicer, and the assuming buyer must meet credit and income requirements. A buyer who simply starts making payments has not assumed anything and has created a serious problem for both parties.

The entitlement question is the one most sellers do not anticipate. If the buyer is VA-eligible and substitutes their own entitlement, the seller's entitlement can generally be restored. If the buyer is not using VA entitlement, the seller's entitlement may remain tied to that loan until it is repaid — which can limit the seller's ability to use the benefit on a next purchase.

Release of liability is the second issue. Without a properly processed release, a seller may remain liable on the loan after transferring the property. This is a documented step, not an assumption.

There is also an equity gap. If the property is worth more than the loan balance, the buyer must cover the difference in cash or through secondary financing, which limits the pool of buyers who can actually complete an assumption.

13. VA refinancing: IRRRL and cash-out

There are two broad VA refinance paths, and they serve different purposes.

The Interest Rate Reduction Refinance Loan, universally called an IRRRL, is designed to refinance an existing VA loan into a new VA loan, typically to lower the rate or move from an adjustable to a fixed structure. It is a streamlined process, and depending on the circumstances the documentation and appraisal requirements may be lighter than a standard refinance. A funding fee generally applies unless the borrower is exempt.

The VA cash-out refinance allows an eligible borrower to refinance and take equity out, and in some circumstances to refinance a non-VA loan into VA financing. Because cash is being drawn, it is a fully underwritten transaction with an appraisal and full documentation.

Both are subject to a net tangible benefit standard. The core question is whether the new loan actually leaves the borrower better off — through a lower rate, a lower payment, a more stable structure, or another documented benefit. Recoupment of costs is part of that analysis, which is why a break-even calculation matters more than the headline rate.

Seasoning requirements apply, meaning a minimum amount of time and payment history on the existing loan before a refinance is permitted. Occupancy treatment can also differ between an IRRRL and a cash-out refinance.

Specific seasoning periods, recoupment tests, and fee treatment are set by the VA and by investors and are revised periodically. Ask for the rules that apply to your file in writing.

IRRRL compared with VA cash-out refinance

	IRRRL	VA cash-out refinance
Existing loan must be VA	Yes	Not always
Cash out permitted	No, aside from limited allowances	Yes, subject to guidelines
Typical documentation	Streamlined	Full documentation
Appraisal	Often not required	Generally required
Funding fee	Generally applies unless exempt	Generally applies unless exempt
Common objective	Lower rate or stabilize structure	Access equity or consolidate

14. PCS moves and Northwest Florida military relocation

Northwest Florida has one of the highest concentrations of military families in the country, and buying a home during a PCS move is a specific discipline. The financing is the same; the compression of the timeline is what changes.

Local installations that drive the regional housing market include Naval Air Station Pensacola, Corry Station, Naval Air Station Whiting Field in Milton, Eglin Air Force Base, Hurlburt Field, and Tyndall Air Force Base near Panama City. Each has its own commuting geography, and the neighborhoods that make sense from one gate rarely make sense from another.

Orders drive everything. Report dates set the closing target, and the earlier a lender sees the orders and the Leave and Earnings Statement, the earlier the pre-qualification reflects reality. Basic Allowance for Housing is a meaningful part of many military household budgets and how it is treated in qualifying depends on program and documentation — it should be discussed specifically, not assumed.

Temporary lodging bridges the gap when the report date arrives before the closing date. Planning for it removes the pressure to accept a bad house because the clock ran out.

Remote property search is normal here. Video walkthroughs, a trusted local agent, and an independent inspection do most of the work. What remote buyers should not skip is the inspection and a careful read of the insurance picture.

Insurance deserves particular attention on the Gulf Coast. Windstorm coverage, flood zone determination, elevation certificates, and deductible structure can change a monthly payment materially. Get quotes early — not the week before closing.

Deployment during a purchase is workable but requires planning around powers of attorney, spousal occupancy, and document signing. Raise it at pre-qualification, not at underwriting.

PCS purchase checklist

- ☐ Share orders and report date with your lender as early as possible
- ☐ Provide current Leave and Earnings Statements
- ☐ Confirm how BAH and any special pays will be documented
- ☐ Map commute times from each installation gate before choosing an area
- ☐ Budget for temporary lodging in case timelines slip
- ☐ Obtain homeowners, windstorm, and flood quotes early
- ☐ Confirm flood zone and whether an elevation certificate affects pricing
- ☐ Arrange a power of attorney if deployment or travel may affect signing
- ☐ Schedule an independent home inspection even for a remote purchase
- ☐ Confirm wire instructions by phone before transferring any funds

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15. VA buyer checklist

Print this page or work through the list in the PDF version. It is the short form of everything above.

Before you write an offer

- ☐ Verify eligibility and obtain your Certificate of Eligibility
- ☐ Review entitlement status, including any prior VA loan still in use
- ☐ Confirm your funding-fee status and any exemption on your COE
- ☐ Gather LES, statements of service or DD-214, and income documentation
- ☐ Review available funds for closing costs and prepaid expenses
- ☐ Estimate your full monthly payment including taxes and insurance
- ☐ Get pre-qualified and read your Loan Estimate line by line
- ☐ Select VA-experienced real estate and lending professionals
- ☐ Assess property condition against minimum property requirements
- ☐ Confirm insurance and flood exposure for the specific address

Between contract and closing

- ☐ Order an independent home inspection
- ☐ Track the VA appraisal and respond quickly to any Tidewater request
- ☐ Return underwriting conditions the same day where possible
- ☐ Avoid new credit accounts, large purchases, and job changes
- ☐ Keep large deposits documented and sourced
- ☐ Review the Closing Disclosure against your Loan Estimate
- ☐ Verify wire instructions by phone using a number you already had
- ☐ Complete the final walkthrough before signing

16. Important disclosure

Document requirements, eligibility, rates, costs, and loan terms vary by mortgage program, lender, investor, property, transaction type, and borrower profile. This guide is educational and is not a loan approval, a commitment to lend, a Loan Estimate, or legal or tax advice. Vabasso Mortgage is not affiliated with, endorsed by, or acting on behalf of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense, or any military installation.

Frequently asked questions

Who qualifies for a VA loan?

In general terms, eligible active-duty service members, veterans, certain National Guard and Reserve members, and certain surviving spouses. Specific length-of-service and character-of-service requirements are set by the VA and vary by service era and component. Your Certificate of Eligibility is the definitive confirmation.

Can I use a VA loan more than once?

Yes. The VA home-loan benefit is reusable and is not limited to first-time buyers. Whether you can use it again with no down payment depends on how much entitlement is available or has been restored.

Do VA loans require a down payment?

Many eligible borrowers with full entitlement can finance a purchase with no down payment. A down payment may still be required depending on entitlement, loan amount, appraised value, and lender guidelines.

What is the VA funding fee?

A one-time fee paid to the VA on most VA loans that helps sustain the program. It may often be financed into the loan. It is not mortgage insurance and is not a recurring monthly charge.

Who is exempt from the funding fee?

Exemptions commonly relate to service-connected disability compensation status and to certain surviving spouses. Your COE reflects the VA's record of your exemption status. If a rating is awarded after closing, a refund of a fee already paid may be possible.

What is a Certificate of Eligibility?

The document confirming that you have VA home-loan entitlement and how much is available. Lenders can usually request it electronically in minutes during pre-qualification.

Does the VA set a minimum credit score?

The VA does not publish one universal minimum score for the program. Individual lenders apply their own minimums, and those differ, which is why a decline from one VA lender is not the end of the conversation.

Can I use a VA loan for a condominium?

Condominium purchases are possible where the project meets applicable VA approval requirements. Project eligibility should be confirmed before you go under contract, because it is a common source of late surprises.

Can I buy a multi-unit property with a VA loan?

Multi-unit properties are permitted in defined circumstances where you occupy one of the units as your primary residence. Unit-count limits and rental-income treatment are program-specific.

Can I use a VA loan for an investment property?

Generally no. VA financing requires primary-residence occupancy. Buying a property purely as a rental is outside the program's purpose. Investors typically look at conventional investor financing, DSCR, or other options.

Can my spouse satisfy the occupancy requirement?

In many active-duty situations, occupancy by a spouse can satisfy the intent of the requirement, particularly during deployment or when stationed away. Documentation is required and treatment varies by scenario.

Can I use rental income to qualify?

Rental income treatment depends on the property type and the documentation available. On an eligible owner-occupied multi-unit property, rental income may be considered under program rules. On a departing residence, treatment varies.

What is residual income?

The money left each month after the mortgage payment, other debts, taxes, and certain estimated maintenance and utility costs. The VA reviews it alongside DTI, and the guidelines vary by household size and region.

Are VA appraisals stricter than other appraisals?

VA appraisals include a review of minimum property requirements focused on safety, soundness, and sanitation, which other appraisals may not include. In that specific sense they can flag items other appraisals would not.

Is a VA appraisal a home inspection?

No. It is a valuation with a property-condition overlay for the lender's and the VA's benefit. An independent home inspection is separate, optional, and strongly recommended.

What is the Tidewater process?

A VA process that gives the listing side an opportunity to provide additional market data when the appraiser anticipates the value may come in below the contract price, before the report is finalized. Response windows are short.

Can a seller pay my closing costs?

Seller concessions and credits are permitted subject to limits and to how the transaction is structured. Whether a particular seller agrees is a negotiation.

What is a VA loan assumption?

A qualified buyer taking over your existing VA loan with its rate and terms, subject to lender or servicer approval. It can be attractive when current rates are higher than the existing loan's rate.

Does an assumption restore my entitlement?

Not always. If the buyer substitutes their own VA entitlement, yours can generally be restored. If the buyer is not VA-eligible or does not substitute entitlement, yours may stay tied to the loan until it is repaid.

Can I refinance with a VA IRRRL?

If you currently have a VA loan, an IRRRL is the streamlined path to refinance into another VA loan, typically for a lower rate or a more stable structure. Seasoning and net tangible benefit standards apply.

Can I take cash out with a VA loan?

A VA cash-out refinance allows eligible borrowers to access equity, and in some circumstances to refinance a non-VA loan into VA financing. It is fully underwritten with an appraisal.

Can I use a VA loan after a bankruptcy?

It may be possible after applicable seasoning and re-established credit. Requirements vary by bankruptcy chapter, by lender, and by the circumstances documented in your file.

Can I buy after a foreclosure or short sale?

Often yes, after applicable seasoning. If the prior loss involved a VA loan, entitlement may have been reduced, which affects how much benefit remains available.

Can I use a VA loan while deployed?

It is possible with planning. A power of attorney, spousal occupancy provisions, and remote signing arrangements are the usual mechanics. Raise deployment timing at pre-qualification.

Does BAH count as income?

Basic Allowance for Housing is a meaningful part of many military budgets, and how it is treated for qualifying depends on the program, the documentation, and the continuance of the allowance. Discuss it specifically with your lender.

Can I use VA financing in Pensacola?

Yes. VA financing is available throughout Florida, including Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. Local considerations include windstorm and flood insurance, which affect the total monthly payment.

Can I use VA financing near Eglin or Hurlburt?

Yes. Okaloosa County and the Fort Walton Beach area are active VA markets. Commute geography from each gate varies considerably, so map drive times before choosing a neighborhood.

How long does a VA purchase take to close?

Timelines depend on appraisal availability, how quickly conditions are returned, and market conditions. There is no universal number, and any lender quoting one without seeing your file is guessing.

Do I have to be a first-time buyer?

No. The benefit has no first-time-buyer requirement and can be used repeatedly across a career, subject to entitlement.

Is eligibility the same as approval?

No. Eligibility means you may use the program. Approval depends on credit, income, residual income, assets, the property, the appraisal, title, occupancy, and full underwriting.

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- [Local market: Okaloosa County](#)
- [Mortgage Readiness Assessment](#)
- [Speak with an advisor](#)

Sources

- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs — VA home loan eligibility](#)
- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs — Certificate of Eligibility](#)
- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs — VA funding fee](#)
- [Consumer Financial Protection Bureau — Loan Estimate explainer](#)

Disclosures

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