A GUIDE FOR VETERANS AND SERVICE MEMBERS

The VA Playbook

Using your benefit to build wealth in Greater Sacramento

House hacking, buying again while you keep the first home, buying with family, and the costs most buyers never hear about.

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BEFORE YOU START

Your benefit is worth more *than zero down.*

Most people know the VA loan as the one with no down payment. That is the smallest part of it.

I've had the privilege of helping veterans throughout my career, working alongside a lending partner who knows VA inside and out. Over time it became a specialty.

This guide covers what I've seen work: buying a 2 to 4 unit property and living in one unit, keeping your first home as a rental and buying again, buying with a family member who isn't a veteran, and getting the seller to pay toward your rate.

Some of these structures are ones many lenders won't do. When one fits you, I'll match you with a lender who specializes in VA.

Shawnii

BOOK A 15-MINUTE CALL →

CONTENTS

What's *inside*

01 Your benefit is reusable
Entitlement, loan limits, and what "used" really means

02 VA as an investment tool
House hacking and the two-home plan

03 Buying with a non-veteran
A joint loan, with a real example

04 The rate is negotiable
Closing costs, the 4% rule, and buydowns

05 Money most buyers leave on the table
The funding fee, property tax, and the appraisal

06 If you already own with VA
The streamline refinance and your next move

07 Your next step
A 15-minute call

The loop this guide is built around



Buy
With VA, often $0 down

Live there
Move in within about 60 days

Rent it
After about 12 months

Buy again
With remaining entitlement

Repeat
As income and entitlement allow

01

Your benefit *is reusable*

Your VA benefit isn't a one-time coupon. You can use it again and again, and you can have more than one VA loan at the same time.

No loan limit with full entitlement

If you've never used your benefit, or you've sold and paid off your last VA loan, you have full entitlement. VA then guarantees 25% of whatever a lender approves you for. There's no VA cap on the price, as long as you qualify and the appraisal supports it.

Using it means tying it up

A VA loan ties up part of your entitlement. Sell the home and pay off the loan, and you can restore it. Keep the home, and whatever entitlement you have left is still available for your next purchase.

Your entitlement on a 2026 county limit of $832,750

Tied up by a $400,000 first loan	Still available
$100,000	$108,188

25% of the county limit: $208,188 of total entitlement.
The $108,188 left supports about $432,750 more in loans with $0 down.

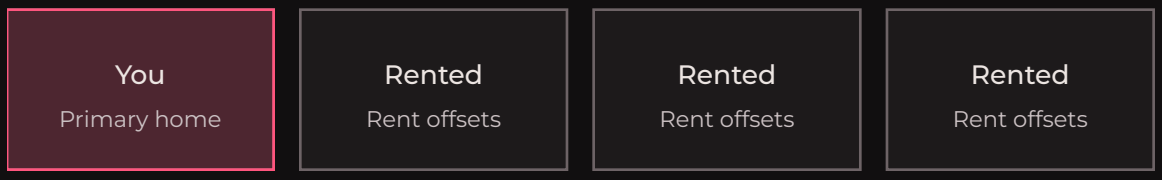
Not sure what you have left? I'll help you pull your Certificate of Eligibility and map it out.
Book a 15-minute call →

02

VA as an *investment tool*

A VA loan has to be for a home you live in. That home can be a duplex, triplex, or fourplex, with tenants paying toward your mortgage from day one.

The house hack



VA allows up to 4 units if one is your home. Rent from the other units can count toward qualifying: VA uses 75% of it when you have 6 months of mortgage payments in reserve.

- **Zero down is still possible** with full entitlement, even on a multi-unit property.
- **Reserves matter.** To count rent from the other units, plan for 6 months of full payments in the bank.
- **Lenders add their own rules.** Many want to see landlord experience or a property manager before they count rent. That requirement is the lender's, not VA's, and it varies from lender to lender.
- **Every unit gets inspected.** The VA appraisal checks all of them, so one rough unit can hold up the whole loan.

02 · VA AS AN INVESTMENT TOOL

The two-home plan

Live in the home first, then keep it as a rental and use your remaining entitlement on the next one.



1	2	3	4	5
Close Certify you'll live there	**Move in** Within about 60 days	**Live there** Plan on about 12 months	**Rent it out** Sign a lease	**Buy again** Your next primary home

SECOND PURCHASE, EXAMPLE	AMOUNT
25% of the 2026 county limit (Sacramento, Placer, El Dorado)	$208,188
Entitlement tied up in a $400,000 first loan	−$100,000
Entitlement still available	$108,188

NEXT LOAN WITH $0 DOWN

~$432,750

If the next home costs more, you put down 25% of the difference instead of 20% of the whole price. A signed lease on the first home helps offset its payment when you qualify for the second.

> Want to see the two-home plan with real Sacramento numbers? Let's run it.
> Book a 15-minute call →

03
Buying with *a non-veteran*

You can buy with a parent, an adult child, a sibling, or a partner who isn't a veteran. This is a VA joint loan, and many lenders don't offer one.

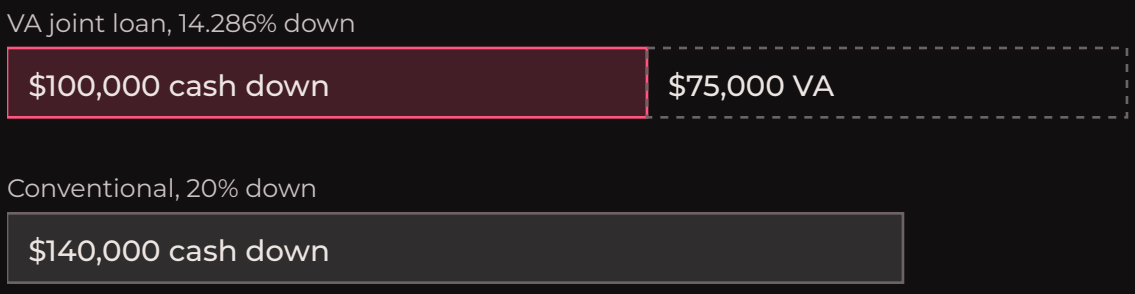
- **A spouse doesn't count.** Buying with your spouse is a regular VA loan, with $0 down still possible.
- **VA guarantees only the veteran's share.** The lender wants the guaranty plus a down payment to cover 25% of the price, so a down payment is usually required.
- **The co-buyer doesn't have to live there.** Only the veteran has to make the home their primary residence.
- **Income works one way.** The veteran's income can help cover the co-buyer's share. The co-buyer's income can't make up for the veteran's.
- **No monthly mortgage insurance,** even with less than 20% down.

Why it works

Two incomes buy more home, and the down payment comes in well below what a 20% conventional loan would need. It's a strong option for a parent and adult child who want to buy together.

A real example

A mother who is a veteran bought with her daughter, who is not. The price was $700,000. Their lender sized the down payment so that the VA guaranty plus the cash down equaled 25% of the price. That works out to **one seventh of the price: 14.286%.**



VA guaranty: 25% of the mother's half of the $600,000 loan.
Together they cover $175,000, or 25% of the price.

VA joint loan

$100,000 down, loan of $600,000, no monthly mortgage insurance.

Conventional

$140,000 down to avoid mortgage insurance on the same home.

Lenders size these loans differently. Some come in around 12.5% down, and many won't do a joint loan at all. Requirements vary by lender.

> Most lenders say no to this. I'll connect you with one who does them.
> Book a 15-minute call →

04
The rate is *negotiable*

With a VA loan, the seller can pay for much more than most buyers ask for. There are two separate buckets, and each has its own rules.

Normal closing costs

Lender fees, appraisal, title, recording. The seller can pay all of them, and VA doesn't cap it.

Concessions

Extras on top of normal closing costs, capped at 4% of the VA appraised value. On a $600,000 home, that's up to $24,000.

What the 4% can pay for

- A temporary rate buydown, such as a 2-1, that lowers your payment for the first two years
- Your VA funding fee
- Prepaid property taxes and insurance
- Paying off a debt so your numbers qualify

How you ask matters as much as what you ask for. A credit written into the offer the right way still looks strong to the seller, especially when the price and terms are clean.

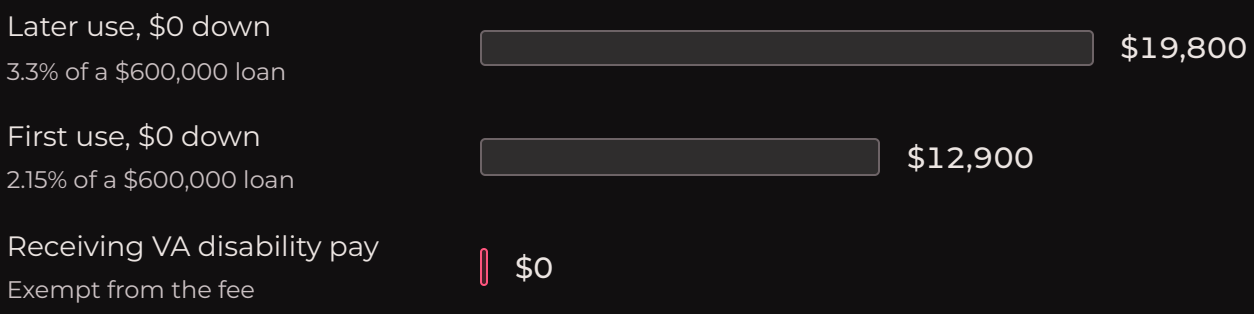
> Let me write the offer so the seller pays toward your rate.
> Book a 15-minute call →

05
Money most buyers *leave on the table*

Three things to check before you write an offer. Any one of them can be worth thousands of dollars.

1. The VA funding fee

It's a one-time fee, usually rolled into the loan. With less than 5% down, it's 2.15% the first time you use VA and 3.3% after that. It drops to 1.5% with 5% down and 1.25% with 10% down.



If your disability claim is still pending at closing, you may pay the fee and then get it refunded once your rating is approved, as long as the rating's effective date is before closing. Keep your award letter.

2. California's Disabled Veterans' Exemption

If you're rated 100% disabled, or paid at the 100% rate because you can't work, California takes a large amount off your home's assessed value every year.

BASIC, 2027	YEARLY SAVINGS	LOW-INCOME
$185,889	~$2,000	$278,836
Taken off your assessed value	At about a 1.1% tax rate	Household income under $83,474

File form BOE-261-G with your county assessor and include your VA rating letter. The basic exemption is filed once. The low-income version is filed again each year.

3. The VA appraisal works for you

The VA appraiser confirms the home is safe, sound, and sanitary, and that the price is supported. If the value comes in low, the VA escape clause lets you renegotiate, pay the difference, or walk away without losing your deposit.

Before a low value becomes final, the appraiser is supposed to give your agent a chance to send in better comparable sales. A prepared agent has those ready.

> **Bring me your rating letter and I'll make sure none of this gets missed.**
> Book a 15-minute call →

06

If you already *own with VA*

You have two moves most VA owners never look at: lower your rate with very little paperwork, or keep the home as a rental and buy your next one.

The streamline refinance (IRRRL)

- Your rate has to drop at least 0.50% on a fixed-to-fixed refinance.
- The closing costs have to pay for themselves through your lower payment within 36 months.
- The loan has to be at least 210 days old, with 6 payments made.
- The funding fee is 0.5%, and usually there's no appraisal and no income paperwork.

Example: $3,600 in costs, $200 a month saved. Break-even at 18 months, inside VA's 36-month limit.



0 18 mo 36 mo

Illustration only. Your numbers depend on your rate and loan.

Rent it and buy again

Once you've lived there, you can keep the home as a rental and use your remaining entitlement on your next home (chapter 2).

Already own with VA? Let's see whether your rate or your next move makes sense now.
Book a 15-minute call →

07
Your *next step*

The fastest way to turn this into a plan is a 15-minute call. We'll go over your entitlement, your goals, and which of these strategies fits you. Then I'll match you with a lender who specializes in VA.

No pressure, and no commitment.

BOOK A 15-MINUTE CALL →

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