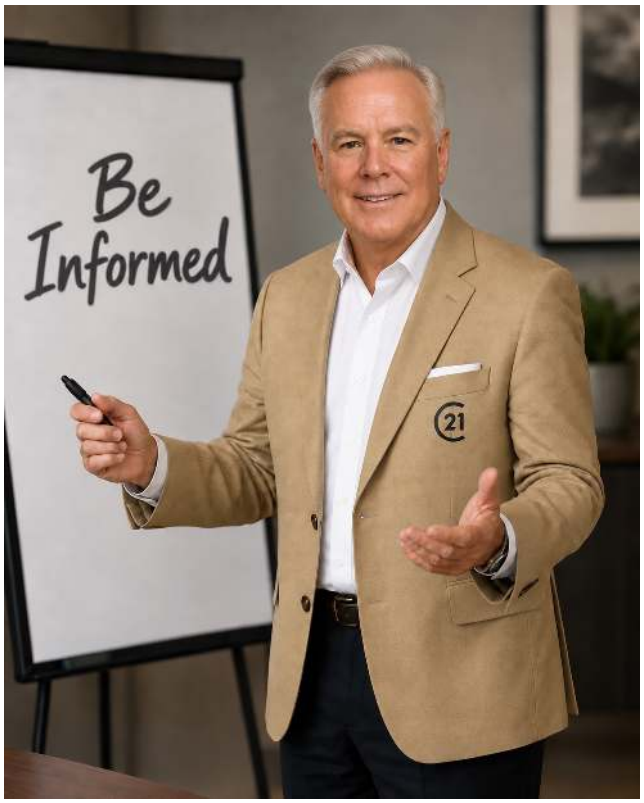
BUYERS

Assistance Programs



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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

CONSUMER GUIDE: ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Buying or keeping a home can be financially challenging—but you may not have to do it alone. There are assistance programs designed to help. Here's what you need to know:

What are housing assistance programs, and who are they for? Assistance programs can help people afford buying, keeping, or maintaining a home. These programs exist at the local, state, and federal level and are often tailored to first-time buyers, lower-income households, veterans, seniors, or people with disabilities. Some programs offer help with down payments or closing costs, while others assist with monthly mortgage payments or needed repairs.

How do down payment assistance programs work? These programs provide grants, forgivable loans, or second mortgages that reduce how much you need to bring to the closing table. Some are income-based, while others are tied to the home's location, your profession, especially if you work in public service (such as teaching, healthcare, or emergency response), your participation in an Employer-Assisted Housing ("EAH") program, or the type of home you're buying. You can explore how these programs may factor into your upfront costs by learning more about preparing for homeownership.

Are there programs that help after I've bought a home? Yes. Some assistance programs are available to help you stay in your home if you experience job loss, rising property taxes, or unexpected repairs. For example, there may be state-run mortgage relief programs or nonprofits offering emergency housing support. If you live in a homeowners association, there may also be resources to help with fees or mediation if you fall behind on payments.

Do assistance programs affect how I get a loan or make an offer? Some programs require that you work with specific lenders or take a homebuyer education course. You may also need to include documentation with your loan application or offer to purchase. These extra steps can take time, but they are often worth it—especially if they make homeownership possible sooner than you expected. An agent who is a REALTOR® can connect you with professionals and information to help navigate what kind of mortgage or financing plan best suits your needs.

Are assistance programs only for first-time buyers? No. While many programs are designed for people buying their first home, others support long-time residents, people returning to homeownership after a divorce or foreclosure, or households trying to stay in generational homes. There are also programs for teachers, firefighters, service members, and rural buyers that don't require being a first-time buyer. In addition, some companies offer EAH programs, which can include financial help with down payments, closing costs, or even monthly housing expenses. These benefits are often coordinated through Human Resources and can be paired with other local or state assistance.

What else should I consider before applying? Assistance programs can help, but they may come with conditions—such as living in the home for a certain number of years or repaying the funds if you sell too soon. Additionally, securing approval and/or funding may take time, so make sure to factor in sufficient time to complete the process. Always consult with your local lender, real estate professional, and/or attorney and ask questions before signing anything. If you're buying a home that needs updates, some programs can be paired with renovation loans or construction financing.

Where can I learn more? The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), state housing finance agencies, and community nonprofits are great places to begin your search. You can also find trusted, easy-to-understand resources on facts.realtor, the National Association of REALTORS®' hub for consumer education.

Practices may vary based on state and local law. Consult your real estate professional and/or an attorney for details about state law where you are purchasing a home. Please visit facts.realtor for more information and resources.

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