Tax Exemptions for Senior Citizens and People with Disabilities

What is a property tax exemption?

If you are eligible for a property tax exemption, your property taxes will be reduced.

You may be eligible for the property tax exemption if:

- You own your home by December 31 the year before the taxes are due;
- You live in your home as your primary residence;
- You have limited income; and
- You are either 61 years old, have a disability, or are a veteran with a service-connected disability rating of 80% or more.

Will my property taxes still increase with the value of my house?

No. When you are approved for the property tax exemption, the value of your property will be “frozen” as of January 1 of the initial application year for property tax purposes. The frozen value of your property (or the market value if it is less) will then be used to determine your property taxes for future years as long as you continue to receive the property tax exemption.

Will the property tax exemption apply to all of my property?

If the land surrounding your home is larger than 1 acre, the property tax exemption only applies to your primary residence and the first acre (and not the rest of the acreage). However, if local zoning regulations require more than one acre of land per residence in the area where you live, you may be eligible for a property tax exemption on up to five acres of land.

Am I eligible for an exemption?

- 61 and older: You may be eligible for a property tax exemption on your primary residence if you have a limited income and you are at least 61 years old in the year you apply for the exemption.
People with disabilities: You may also get the exemption if you have a limited income and you have a disability that prevents you from working. For the application, you can demonstrate that you have a disability by providing proof that the Social Security Administration (SSA) has determined that you have a disability (by providing your SSA award letter) or you can have your doctor complete a “Proof of Disability Statement”. You can get a Proof of Disability Statement on the Department of Revenue’s website.

Veterans of the US armed forces with a total disability and, as of July 28, 2019, veterans with a service-connected disability rating of 80% or more may get an exemption.

Can I use the property tax exemption for a second home?

No. The property tax exemption only applies to your primary residence. You cannot get a property tax exemption on any property where you don’t live most of the time (like a second home or rental property).

Can I keep the exemption even if I have to move to get long-term care?

After you qualify, you can keep the property tax exemption on your home, even if you have to go into a hospital, nursing facility, assisted living facility.

RCW 84.36.381(1) states that you can keep the exemption even if you have to move into a relative’s home to get long-term care.

If a person with a tax exemption dies, their spouse may be able to claim the same exemption.

Even if a surviving spouse or domestic partner is not old enough to qualify for the property tax exemption, they may be able to continue the property tax exemption if they are 57 years or older and they meet the other eligibility criteria (they own and live in the home and have a limited income).

What are the income limits to qualify for an exemption?

To qualify for an exemption, you must have a limited household income.
People with lower household incomes may get a bigger tax exemption than those with higher household incomes.

Your exemption rate is based on your “combined disposable income.” It includes your income, your spouse’s income, and anybody else living with you who owns part of the house.

If you have certain medical expenses, your “combined disposable income” may be lowered. See RCW 84.36.383.

How much property tax is exempt in 2019?

The exemption laws include 3 levels or “thresholds” of income eligibility.

**Income threshold 1:** If your household income is between $0 and $30,000, you are exempt from regular property taxes on the greater of the first $60,000 or 60% of your home’s assessed value.

**Income threshold 2:** If your household income is between $30,001 and $35,000, you are exempt from regular property taxes on the greater of $50,000 or 35% of the assessed value, up to $70,000 of your home’s assessed value.

**Income threshold 3:** If your household income is between $35,001 and $40,000, you are exempt from all “excess” property taxes. “Excess” property taxes (special levies) require voter approval. They provide funds for a specific purpose, such as school bonds or maintenance and operation levies.

How much property tax will be exempt in 2020?

Starting in 2020, the way your exemption will be calculated changes—more people will probably qualify for the exemption.

Under the new calculation, your income will be compared to the median income in the county where you live. If the median income in your county has gone up a lot, you may be in threshold 1 (and get a bigger exemption) even if you make more than $30,000.

**Starting in 2020:**

**Income threshold 1:** If your household income is less than or equal to 45% of the county median household income or $30,000 (whichever is greater), you will be exempt from regular property taxes on the greater of the first $60,000 or 60% of your home’s assessed value.

**Income threshold 2:** If your household income is less than or equal to 55% of the county median household income or $35,000 (whichever is greater), you will be exempt from regular property taxes on the greater of $50,000 or 35% of the assessed value, up to $70,000 of your home’s assessed value.

**Income threshold 3:** If your household income is less than or equal to 65% of the county median household income or $40,000 (whichever is greater), you will be exempt from all “excess” property taxes. “Excess” property taxes (special levies) require voter approval. They provide funds for a specific purpose, such as school bonds or maintenance and operation levies.
How long will I be eligible?

You will continue to be eligible every year as long as you meet the eligibility requirements. The exemption is effective for taxes assessed in the year after the year you apply and generally continues for 3 – 6 years.

In the year that your exemption expires, the county assessor should send you a renewal application. You should submit the renewal application so your exemption will continue.

If you met the requirements in the past, but did not apply for the property tax exemption, you may be able to get the exemption going back three years. You could get a refund of taxes you already paid.

What if I cannot afford to pay the reduced rate after the exemption?

You may be able to get your property taxes deferred (put off or delayed) if one of these is true:

- You are behind in taxes. You cannot pay even at the lower rate.
- You are in or facing foreclosure due to unpaid back taxes.

When property taxes are deferred, the taxes owed (plus 5% interest) become payable again when you sell the home, move away from the home, or become otherwise ineligible for the property tax deferral.

When you die, your surviving spouse or domestic partner may be able to continue the property tax deferral so the deferred taxes wouldn’t become due until they die.

If you were to die, but one of your heirs living in the house meets the eligibility requirements for a property tax deferral (for example, an adult child with disabilities), they may be able get the same tax deferral you had as long as they continue to live in the house.

How do I apply?

Call your county assessor for information on how to apply for the property tax exemption in your county. All counties in Washington must offer property tax exemptions.

If your property tax exemption application is denied, you can file an appeal to the county Board of Equalization within 30 days of the date they mailed the denial. There are different kinds of appeals.

Call your county assessor or treasurer’s office for more information or try to get legal help.

What if I need legal help?

Outside King County: Call the CLEAR Hotline at 1-888-201-1014 weekdays from 9:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

In King County: Call 211 for information and referral to an appropriate legal services provider Monday through Friday from 8:00 am – 6:00 pm.

Persons 60 and Over may call CLEAR*Sr at 1-888-387-7111 (statewide).

Deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired callers can call CLEAR or 211 (or toll-free 1-877-211-9274) using the relay service of their choice.
Apply online with CLEAR*Online - nwjustice.org/get-legal-help

211 and CLEAR will provide a free interpreter if you need one.

This publication provides general information concerning your rights and responsibilities. It is not intended as a substitute for specific legal advice.

This information is current as of July 2019.

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