

SAN ANTONIO · 2026–2027 EDITION

The First-Time Home Buyer Guide

Everything you need to go from renting to owning in San Antonio — the steps, the real costs, and the Texas programs that can put money toward your down payment.

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Welcome home

A NOTE FROM KASSIE

Buying your first home is one of the biggest decisions you'll ever make — and it should feel exciting, not overwhelming. This guide walks you through the entire process, explains the costs in plain English, and points you to assistance programs that many San Antonio buyers never hear about.

> **San Antonio at a glance:** The median sale price in Bexar County was about **$286,000** over the three months ending August 2026, down 1.4% from a year earlier (Redfin). Softer prices and more inventory mean first-time buyers often have more room to negotiate than they did a few years ago.

What's inside

1. The 10 steps to buying your first home	5. Your document checklist
2. Understanding loan options	6. Mistakes to avoid
3. What it really costs	7. Key terms, decoded
4. Down payment assistance in San Antonio & Texas	8. Your next step

The 10 steps to your first home

FROM FIRST THOUGHT TO FRONT DOOR KEYS

1. **Check your finances.** Pull your free credit reports at AnnualCreditReport.com, review your monthly budget, and decide what payment feels comfortable — not just what a lender approves.
2. **Take a homebuyer education class.** Many assistance programs require one, and it's worth it either way. Ask me for recommended local and online courses.
3. **Get pre-approved.** A lender reviews your income, assets, and credit to tell you how much you can borrow. Sellers expect a pre-approval letter with every offer.
4. **Partner with a REALTOR®.** I'll review your agreement with you up front, set your search criteria, and send matching homes as soon as they hit the market.
5. **Tour homes and neighborhoods.** Think about commute, schools, HOA rules, flood zones, and resale value — not just the kitchen.
6. **Make an offer.** Together we'll decide on price, earnest money, option period, closing date, and whether to ask the seller for help with closing costs.
7. **Use your option period wisely.** In Texas, you pay a small option fee for the right to back out for any reason during a set number of days. This is when you schedule your inspection.
8. **Appraisal & underwriting.** Your lender orders an appraisal and finalizes your loan. Don't open new credit, change jobs, or make large purchases during this time.
9. **Final walkthrough.** Confirm agreed repairs are done and the home is in the expected condition.
10. **Close and get your keys.** Sign at the title company, fund your loan, and move in. Then file your homestead exemption (see Mistakes to avoid).

Understanding loan options

FIND THE RIGHT FIT

The right loan depends on your credit, savings, and service history. These are the most common options for first-time buyers:

Loan type	Minimum down	Best for
FHA	3.5% with a 580+ credit score (FHA.com)	Buyers building credit or with smaller savings. Requires mortgage insurance (MIP) regardless of down payment (Bankrate).
VA	0% for eligible borrowers	Active duty, veterans, and eligible surviving spouses. No monthly mortgage insurance. Huge for San Antonio's military community.
Conventional	As low as 3% on some first-time buyer programs	Buyers with stronger credit. Mortgage insurance can be removed once you reach enough equity.
USDA	0% in eligible areas	Buyers in qualifying rural/suburban areas around San Antonio who meet income limits.

The 2026 FHA loan limit for a single-family home is $541,287 in most U.S. counties (Bankrate). Exact requirements vary by lender — always confirm with your loan officer.

> **Military buyers:** If you're PCSing to JBSA, ask your lender for your VA Certificate of Eligibility early. I can help you shop and close remotely, so you're not starting from scratch when you arrive.

What it really costs

NO SURPRISES AT CLOSING

Cost	When you pay	What to expect
Earnest money	After your offer is accepted	A good-faith deposit held by the title company and credited toward your purchase at closing.
Option fee	After your offer is accepted	A small, negotiable fee paid to the seller for the option period. Often credited at closing.
Home inspection	During the option period	Paid to the inspector. Add-ons like a sewer scope or termite inspection cost extra.
Appraisal	During underwriting	Ordered by your lender, usually paid upfront or at closing.
Down payment	At closing	0%–20%+ depending on loan type.
Closing costs	At closing	Lender fees, title insurance, prepaid taxes and insurance, and escrow setup. Sellers can sometimes contribute.

Texas tip: Texas has no state income tax, but property taxes are higher than in many states. Budget for taxes and homeowners insurance in your monthly payment, not just principal and interest.

Down payment assistance

MONEY MANY BUYERS NEVER ASK ABOUT

San Antonio and Texas offer several programs that can help with your down payment and closing costs. Income limits, purchase price caps, and funding availability change, so we'll confirm eligibility with an approved lender.

City of San Antonio — Homeownership Incentive Program (HIP)

HIP 80 offers eligible first-time buyers up to **$30,000**, and HIP 120 offers up to **$15,000**. The City paused new fiscal-year 2026 applications, with funding possibly resuming October 1, 2026 if renewed by City Council (HIP program site). Ask about each program's forgiveness terms. HIP 120 is a 0% interest program and requires an 8-hour homebuyer class (City of San Antonio).

Neighborhood Housing Services of San Antonio

Offers up to **$12,000** in down payment and closing cost assistance to eligible first-time buyers in Bexar County and surrounding areas, structured as a deferred second lien (NHSSA).

TDHCA — My First Texas Home

The state housing agency's program pairs FHA, VA, or USDA loans with down payment and closing cost assistance for first-time buyers (TDHCA). It also offers Mortgage Credit Certificates, which can reduce your federal taxes each year.

TSAHC — Home Sweet Texas & Homes for Texas Heroes

The Texas State Affordable Housing Corporation offers fixed-rate loans with down payment assistance and Mortgage Credit Certificates (TSAHC). Homes for Texas Heroes is specifically for teachers, firefighters and EMS personnel, police and correctional officers, and veterans (TSAHC).

> **How to start:** Take an eligibility quiz, apply with an approved lender, complete a homebuyer education course, and work with a REALTOR® who knows the programs (TSAHC). I'll connect you with lenders who work with these programs regularly.

Your document checklist

HAVE THESE READY FOR YOUR LENDER

- [ ] Government-issued photo ID
- [ ] Last 30 days of pay stubs
- [ ] W-2s from the last 2 years
- [ ] Federal tax returns, last 2 years
- [ ] Last 2 months of bank statements (all pages)
- [ ] Retirement and investment statements
- [ ] Gift letter, if family is helping
- [ ] Rental history or landlord contact
- [ ] VA Certificate of Eligibility (if applicable)
- [ ] LES / orders for military buyers
- [ ] Divorce or child support documents (if applicable)
- [ ] Explanation of any credit issues

Mistakes to avoid

- **House hunting before pre-approval.** Falling in love with a home you can't finance is heartbreaking — and sellers won't take you seriously.
- **Changing your finances mid-process.** No new cars, credit cards, furniture on credit, or job changes until after closing.
- **Skipping the inspection.** Even new construction can have issues. Your option period exists for a reason.
- **Draining every dollar of savings.** Keep a cushion for moving, repairs, and the unexpected.
- **Forgetting the homestead exemption.** After you move in, apply with the Bexar Appraisal District to lower your property taxes.
- **Not asking about assistance.** Many buyers qualify for programs they've never heard of.

Key terms, decoded

TALK LIKE A PRO

Pre-approval
A lender's conditional commitment to lend you a specific amount after reviewing your documents.

Earnest money
A deposit showing you're serious; held by the title company and applied at closing.

Option period
A Texas contract term giving you the unrestricted right to terminate for a set number of days, in exchange for an option fee.

Appraisal
An independent estimate of the home's value required by your lender.

Escrow
An account your lender uses to pay property taxes and insurance on your behalf.

Title insurance
Protects you and your lender against ownership disputes or claims on the property.

PMI / MIP
Mortgage insurance that protects the lender when your down payment is small.

Seller concessions
Money the seller agrees to contribute toward your closing costs.

Homestead exemption
A Texas property tax reduction on your primary residence.

Closing Disclosure
The final breakdown of your loan terms and costs, delivered before closing.

Your next step

LET'S FIND YOUR KEY TO HOME



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As a member of The GoldenEye Group at Barlowe Daly Realty, I help first-time buyers, military families, and homeowners navigate San Antonio real estate with honesty, strategy, and heart.

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Book your free first-time buyer consultation

We'll talk through your budget, timeline, and neighborhoods, review which assistance programs you may qualify for, and connect you with trusted local lenders. No pressure, no obligation.

Call or text 210-361-7715

Sources

- Redfin, Bexar County Housing Market — https://www.redfin.com/county/2654/TX/Bexar-County/housing-market
- San Antonio Homeownership Incentive Program — https://www.sanantoniohomeownershipincentiveprogram.com/
- City of San Antonio, HIP 120 General Information — https://www.sa.gov/files/assets/main/v/5/nhsd/documents/hip120-generalinformation.pdf
- Neighborhood Housing Services of San Antonio — https://www.nhsofsa.org/down-payment-loans
- TDHCA Texas Homebuyer Programs — https://welcomehome.tdhca.texas.gov/programs
- TSAHC Homebuyer Programs — https://www.tsahc.org/lenders-realtors/tsahc-homebuyer-programs/
- TSAHC Down Payment Assistance — https://www.tsahc.org/landing/home-down-payment-assistance
- TSAHC Home Buyers & Renters — https://www.tsahc.org/homebuyers-renters
- FHA.com Credit Requirements — https://www.fha.com/fha_credit_requirements
- Bankrate, What Is an FHA Loan — https://www.bankrate.com/mortgages/what-is-an-fha-loan/

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