

Reverse Mortgage Suitability Self-Evaluation Worksheet

Why the Suitability Self-Evaluation Worksheet?

Whether a loan is “suitable” or right for the borrower who is considering it can only be determined by looking at the totality of that particular borrower's circumstances, goals, and needs. Suitability is a very personal matter. Seniors interested in reverse mortgages need to determine whether a reverse mortgage is right for them, and, if so, which reverse mortgage is most appropriate.

Because reverse mortgage decision-making involves a number of complex issues, before committing to a loan every senior should contemplate possible negative consequences. CANHR highly recommends that seniors use this suitability worksheet before committing to the purchase of a reverse mortgage.

Every prospective purchaser of a reverse mortgage should study and complete this worksheet before attending their mandatory HUD-approved reverse mortgage counseling session. No purchaser should move forward in purchasing their reverse mortgage loan unless and until he or she completes this self-evaluation and clearly understands if a reverse mortgage is suitable for his or her needs.

Benefits of the Suitability Self-Evaluation Worksheet

- The senior can contemplate the suitability of a reverse mortgage at his or her leisure.
- The senior should complete and bring the worksheet to his or her counseling session so that he or she may ask the counselor questions that will help clarify if having a reverse mortgage is ultimately a suitable proposition.
- The worksheet is designed to help the senior understand the various suitability issues and to prepare the senior for the mandatory counseling session.
- There is simply not enough time in the counseling session to cover all aspects of reverse mortgages.
- Having completed a pre-counseling worksheet will serve as a roadmap to both the senior and counselor throughout the session.

- Having a completed worksheet will promote an efficient counseling session by keeping the session focused on issues that the senior has pre-identified as being important or in need of further clarification.

The Pre-Counseling Self-Evaluation Suitability Worksheet

Directions: Carefully read through each of these suitability questions and make notes on a separate piece of paper regarding any question you may have about suitability. You are also advised to bring these questions with you when you have your reverse mortgage counseling session. The purpose of the counseling session is for you to have an opportunity to speak openly and candidly with a neutral professional whose sole purpose is to help you understand what it means to become involved with this particular loan.

Five Questions to Help You Decide: Is a Reverse Mortgage Right For Me?

1. What happens to others in your home after you die or move out?

Rule: When the borrower dies, moves, or is absent from the home for 12 consecutive months, the loan becomes due.

Considerations: Having a reverse mortgage affects the future of all those living with you. If the loan cannot be paid off, then the home will have to be sold in order to satisfy the lender.

- Who is currently living in the home with you?
- What will they do when you die or permanently move from the home?
- Have you discussed this with all those living with you or any family members?
 - Who will pay off the loan, and have you discussed this with them?
 - If your heirs do not have enough money to pay off the loan, the home will pass into foreclosure.

Do you need to discuss this with your counselor?

Yes or No

2. Do you know that you can default on a reverse mortgage?

Rule: There are three continuous financial obligations. If you fail to keep up with your insurance, property taxes, and home maintenance, you will go into default. Uncured defaults lead to foreclosures.

Considerations: Will you have adequate resources and income to support your financial needs and obligations once you have removed all of your available equity with a reverse mortgage?

- Are you contemplating a lump-sum withdrawal?
- What other resources will you have once you have reached your equity withdrawal limit?
- Will you have funds to pay for unexpected medical expenses?
- Will you have the ability to finance alternative living accommodations, such as independent living, assisted living, or a long-term care nursing home?
- Will you have the ability to finance routine or catastrophic home repairs, especially if maintenance is a factor that may determine when the mortgage becomes payable?

Do you need to discuss this with your counselor?

Yes or No

3. Have you fully explored other options?

Rule: Less costly options may exist.

Consideration: Reverse mortgages are compounding loans, and the debt to the lender accelerates as time goes on. You may want to consider using less expensive alternatives or other assets you may have before you commit to a reverse mortgage.

- Alternative financial options for seniors may include, but not be limited to, less costly home equity lines of credit, property tax deferral programs, or governmental aid programs.
- With peer-to-peer lending or other contractual arrangements, you can use your home equity to secure loans from family members, friends, or would-be heirs.
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Do you need to discuss this with your counselor?

Yes or No

4. Are you intending to use the reverse mortgage to purchase a financial product?

Rule: Reverse mortgages are interest-accruing loans.

Considerations: Due to the high cost and accelerating debt incurred by reverse mortgages, using home equity to finance investments is not suitable in most instances.

- The cost of the reverse mortgage loan may exceed any financial gain from any product purchased.

- Will the financial product you are considering freeze or otherwise tie up your money?
- There may be high surrender fees, service charges or undisclosed costs on the financial products purchased with the proceeds of a reverse mortgage.
- Has the sales agent offering the financial product discussed suitability with you, and has the agent given you a written suitability evaluation?
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Do you need to discuss this with your counselor?

Yes or No

5. The impact of reverse mortgages on your eligibility for government assistance programs.

Rule: Income received from investments will count against individuals seeking government assistance.

Considerations: Converting your home equity into investments may create non-exempt asset statuses.

- There are state and federal taxes on the income investments financed through home equity.
- If you go into a nursing home for an extended period of time, the reverse mortgage loan will become due, the home may be sold, and any proceeds from the sale of the home may make you ineligible for government benefits.
- If the homeowner is a Medi-Cal beneficiary, a reverse mortgage may stymie the ability to transfer the home, thus, resulting in Medi-Cal recovery.
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Do you need to discuss this with your counselor?

Yes or No

Prepared by California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform (CANHR)

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