

Low and moderate income older Nebraskans have until June 30 to apply for a homestead exemption to obtain relief from property taxes.

This annual exemption excludes all or a portion of the value of a person's home and up to one acre of the land that the home is built on from property taxes.

Robert Courtney, AARP Nebraska's volunteer state coordinator for advocacy, urged people over the age of 65 to take a careful look at the homestead exemption.

"AARP is concerned that too many homeowners who qualify for a full or partial homestead exemption are not getting any help because they don't think they are eligible," he said.

"Often people are surprised to learn that they qualify once they deduct their annual health care costs from their income."

Older homeowners may qualify for a full or partial exemption if:

- They are age 65 or older and have an annual household income at or below \$31,301 for a single person and at or below \$36,801 in combined income for a couple. People can deduct most of their medical expenses in determining their income and eligibility for the homestead exemption. As a general rule of thumb, a single person with an income around \$36,000 or a married couple with an income around \$44,000 may be eligible for relief after deducting medical expenses.

- The maximum value of the homestead that can qualify for the exemption is \$95,000 or 200 percent of the county's average assessed value of single family residential property, whichever is greater.

- They own and occupy the homestead Jan. 1 through Aug. 15.

- Persons under 65 with disabilities and disabled veterans may also qualify for the exemption, but different eligibility guidelines apply. People should check with their County Assessor's office for details.

Homestead exemption applications must be submitted to the County Assessor on or before June 30. Homestead exemption application forms are also available at www.revenue.state.ne.us.

County assessors can answer questions and may be able to assist with the paperwork.

Courtney added that the Nebraska Legislature made two important changes this year to the homestead exemption that AARP strongly supported and are now in effect. One change allows the transfer of property currently approved for the homestead exemption to be moved to a new owner-occupied home on the date of the move to the new residence.

The old law required a homeowner to sell their previous property to become eligible for the transfer.

The second change extends the deadline for filing the homestead exemption until May 1 of the next calendar year in case of a serious illness.