New Ontario AODA Website Accessibility Rules Take Effect January 1, 2021



Does your website and web content meet WCAG 2.0 level AA accessibility standards?

Ontario employers with 50 or more employees that are subject to the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) must comply with new website accessibility requirements by January 1, 2021. Here's a quick overview of what you must do to comply.

AODA Website Accessibility Rules

Adopted in 2005, the AODA establishes a framework designed to make all aspects of public life, including workplaces fully accessible to persons with disabilities by 2025. The AODA *Integrated Accessibility Standards* regulation requires covered employers to ensure their websites and web content comply with an internationally accepted accessibility standard called the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.

Who's Covered?

The website accessibility requirements apply to businesses and non-profits that:

- Are in Ontario;
- Have 50+ employees; and
- Have control over their website's appearance, functionality and content.

What Does Accessibility Mean?

The idea is to ensure that all new website content posted after January 1, 2021 meets the applicable WCAG 2.0 criteria for that particular content. WCAG 2.0 is actually made up of different guidelines, each of which has 3 levels of accessibility, starting with A and progressing in stringency to AA and AAA. By January 1, 2021, covered organizations must ensure that all their "internet websites and web content" meet level AA.

The AODA defines "internet website" as a collection of related web pages, images, videos or other digital assets that are addressed relative to a common Uniform Resource Identifier (URI) and accessible to the public. "Web content" is defined

broadly to include any information that may be found on a web page or web application, including text, images, forms and sounds.

How to Comply

You'll need to access the AA level requirements for each of the 3 guidelines contained in WCAG 2.0 and perform on an audit to ensure your website and content conform to its requirements. See the shaded box below for a list of and link to each guideline.

Applicable WCAG 2.0 Guidelines

To comply with the new AODA website accessibility requirements, you must ensure that your websites and web content meet level AA of the following WCAG 2.0 guidelines.

Guideline 1.4: Distinguishable content:

- Success Criterion 1.4.3 Contrast (Minimum)
- Success Criterion 1.4.4 Resize text
- Success Criterion 1.4.5 Images of text

Guideline 2.4: Navigable content:

- Success Criterion 2.4.5 Multiple ways
- Success Criterion 2.4.6 Headings and labels
- Success Criterion 2.4.7 Focus visible

Guideline 3.1: Readable text content

- Success Criterion 3.1.2 Language of parts

Guideline 3.2: Predictable web pages

- Success Criterion 3.2.4 Consistent identification

Guideline 3.3: Input assistance

- Success Criterion 3.3.3 Error suggestion
- Success Criterion 3.3.4 Error prevention (Legal, financial, data)

How Can You Tell If Your Websites Comply?

Four of the things the guidelines suggest you can do to determine if your new or refreshed website is accessible:

1. Use Automatic Assessment and Assistive Technology

Do a final evaluation of your site using an automatic assessment to flag any issues that may not have been resolved. For example, you can review your site using assistive technology such as a screen reader to make sure the design and technical aspects of the site are accessible.

2. Perform User Testing

If possible, ask people with disabilities to test your new or refreshed site before you launch. Get feedback from customers and other site users to find out if you need any improvements.

3. Review Key Milestones and Changes

Keep a record of the accessibility issues that have been repaired, or ask your web developer to maintain such a record. This will show you the completed work and the new level of accessibility. It will also be helpful if your organization is asked to show that your website is WCAG 2.0 compliant.

4. Use Online Accessibility Checker

You can use an online tool to check if your website is accessible. Using an online accessibility checker doesn't guarantee that you'll detect all accessibility issues with your website. So, it's also important to have an actual person review the site.

What If You Can't Comply?

You don't have to comply with the WCAG 2.0 requirements if it's "not practicable." Unfortunately, neither the AODA statute nor regulations define what "not practicable" means. However, guidelines from Accessibility Ontario, a training and development organization that helps businesses in Ontario understand and comply with the AODA, suggests that factors relevant to practicability may include:

- Availability of accessible goods, services or facilities; or
- Technological compatibility between older products and newer ones being procured.

Additional government guidelines for employers offer further insight. "Sometimes it may not be possible to meet the WCAG 2.0 requirements," they note. "For example, you may have used software and other tools that predate WCAG 2.0 to develop your website. You may be able to update or repair the products you used to support accessibility. If this is not possible, make sure you use software that supports accessibility the next time you refresh your site."

The guidelines also explain that it may not be possible to post some content in a way that complies with WCAG 2.0, such as online maps and complex diagrams in a way that's accessible to people with visual disabilities. "In such cases you may still post the content, but you must provide it in an accessible format upon request," the guidelines note.