

New Ontario Website Accessibility Regulations For Large Organizations Come Into Effect



As of January 1st of this year, organizations with 50 or more employees in Ontario that create new publicly accessible websites, or that perform a significant refresh of an existing publicly accessible website, are required to ensure that those websites meet the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 ("WCAG 2.0") to Level A.

The new requirements come from the Integrated Accessibility Standards, a provincial regulation made under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. These requirements apply to the content on all new or significantly refreshed public-facing websites, including web-based applications, that an organization with 50 or more employees in Ontario controls directly or controls through a contractual relationship that allows for modification of the website. However, only web content on those new or refreshed websites published after January 1, 2012, is required to comply.

For the purposes of these regulations, a new website is one with a new domain name, while a "significant refresh" of a website means "changing more than 50% of the content, design or technology of the website" according to the Government of Ontario's "Information and Communication Standards: Making your website more accessible" guidance document. Such a refresh could be one that produces a new look and feel to the website, changes how users navigate around the website, or significantly changes the content of the website. Many other changes may also be significant refreshes.

The WCAG 2.0 includes three levels of compliance: Levels A, AA, and AAA. Level AAA is the highest level of accessibility. As of January 1, 2014, new or refreshed websites are only required to meet Level A. Level A requirements include accessibility measures such as:

- ensuring text alternatives to non-text content;
- providing captioning for pre-recorded audio content;
- using methods other than relying solely on colour to distinguish content or provide information;
- providing audio controls for any automatic audio playing;
- ensuring functionality is operable solely through a keyboard interface;
- providing alternatives to time-limits on user action;
- ensuring readability and navigability; and

- avoiding seizure-inducing content.

The full details and requirements of WCAG 2.0, including exceptions, can be found [here](#).

While only compliance with WCAG 2.0 Level A is mandated now, as of January 1, 2012 the Integrated Accessibility Standards will require that all organizations with 50 or more employees in Ontario ensure that all of their websites and any content published after January 1, 2012 meet the WCAG 2.0 to Level AA, with the exception of the requirements for captions for live audio content and captions for pre-recorded video content. It may therefore be advisable to upgrade all websites to Level AA at this time to avoid the need for additional future updates.

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Article by Matthew Marinett

Gowling Lafleur Henderson LLP