healthwatch

Web accessibility guidance

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About this resource

We are committed to making sure all our information is clear and accessible for everyone.

With more people seeking advice and information and sharing their views with Healthwatch online, it's important that we are all taking steps to ensure our websites are accessible.

This guidance highlights five key areas and the simple steps you can follow to ensure your content is as accessible as possible.

What do we mean by web accessibility?

Web accessibility means ensuring that everyone can use your website, providing equal access and equal opportunities to people with diverse abilities. Having an accessible website ensures that it is easy for everyone to use and to understand the content.

Healthwatch England built the website template to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)2.1 to level AA. As accessibility guidance evolves with technology, we regularly get external organisations to conduct reviews to highlight areas we could improve and update your websites accordingly.

Whose responsibility is it to ensure accessibility?

It is all our responsibility to make sure that everything we are doing is with accessibility in mind. We are all required to meet the Equality Act 2010, and you should have an accessibility policy on your website outlining how you aim to meet the legal requirements outlined.

The content you produce and upload (news, reports, videos, images) must continue to meet high standards to ensure you provide information that everyone can easily benefit from.

People who have a good experience on your website and can find and understand information quickly and easily are more likely to return.

Five key areas to ensure your content is accessible

Read our five key areas and the simple steps you can follow to ensure your content is as accessible as possible.

1. Structure your content well

Always use headings

Headings represent the key concepts and supporting ideas in the article. For people using screen readers (technology that helps people who have visual impairments to access and interact with digital content via audio or touch), they allow people to logically navigate through an article and understand its structure. Visually, headings convey levels of importance, allowing readers who want to find the information they are looking for quickly.

- The heading should summarise the paragraph below it.

- Headings should always have the largest heading at the top of the page. You should then use the headings in size order (Heading 2 – 5).

- Never use the same heading text twice in an article / on a page as this confuses screen readers. For example, don't have two sections called 'Volunteering with us' on the same page.

Find out more information on headings here.

Start with the most important information

Online, the page is scanned in an F shape – across the top and down the left-hand side.

- Always start an article with the most important piece of information you want the reader to take away.

- Use headings aligned to the left throughout the body of the text to catch a reader's attention as they scan down the page.

Find out more about how to put key content at the top of your page.

Ensure your links are descriptive

Screen readers analyse links to determine whether there is any useful related content on a page. Because of this, they often process links out of context. The link must make sense out of context. For example, "Read our accessibility guidance" not "Click here"

- If a link is to a pdf or word document, try to describe that in the link so that users know what to expect when they click on the link.

- Wherever possible, links to another page on your website should open in the same window. Screen readers do not announce that a new window has opened, so users can then find it very frustrating or confusing when the 'Go back' function doesn't work.

Find out more information on how to display links.

2. Writing well for an online audience

Use plain English that is simple to understand and easy to read

For most people, reading from a screen is more tiring than from a piece of paper. People typically read 25% slower on screen, so ease the burden and keep your language simple to understand.

People read differently online than they do on paper. They scan web pages and read on average about 18% of what is on the page. Keep your content short and simple so it can be understood quickly.

- Keep your sentences and paragraphs concise. Do not repeat yourself.

- Have one concept per paragraph. Linking more than one concept in a paragraph makes it harder to understand.

- Refer to the reader as 'you' and your Healthwatch as 'we'.

- Break up your text with lists – bullet points make content more manageable and easier to digest. Ensure you always use the bullet points in the formatting toolbar – these mean that a screen reader will recognise it as a list and announce it to the user.

- Do not use jargon, long or complicated words. Do not assume jargon used within Healthwatch (for example Enter and View) will be automatically understood by the public. Always write out an abbreviation on the first reference.

Try this free tool to help you write in plain English.

Find out more information about writing using plain English.

[Find out more about making your content easy to read.](#)

3. Using images

Providing alternative text

Alternative text (alt text) allows people with visual impairments to understand the images you display on your website.

- Screen readers automatically detect alt text and announce it as an image. Your alt text should not therefore contain "Image of…" as this would be read by a screen reader as "Image, image of an apple".

- Alt text must be as concise as possible and simply describe the image (Not the context of the image to the article).

- If you do not put alt text on an image, a screen reader will read the image file name. This has no context and often makes no sense, creating a poor user experience for your website visitors.

[Find out more information on providing suitable alternative text.](#)

Images with text

Images with text are not accessible and where ever possible should be avoided. No screen reader can currently read text inside an image. Images with logos are the exception and are permitted but the alt text must include the words from the image.

- Keep your sentences and paragraphs concise. Do not repeat yourself.

- If you use an image with text in it, you must ensure the image complies with colour contrast restrictions to meet WCAG accessibility standards – contrast ratio of 4.5:1. [You can check the colour contrast on this website.](#)

- Remember that as part of our accessibility standards the website must function when zoomed in to 400% - the text in an image must still be legible at this rate, same as the rest of the website.

[Find out more information on using images that contain text.](#)

4. Using multimedia

When uploading multimedia content ensure it has accompanying text. There are a number of ways you might do this, depending on the content.

Transcripts

A transcript is a text version of the media content. This is often uploaded as a document someone can open and read the entire transcript in one go. This makes video content accessible for people who:

- Can't hear due to auditory problems

- Process information differently due to cognitive impairments

- Speak a different language

- Learn better by skimming text

- Have limited mobile data or a poor internet connection speed

- Can't play audio due to their environment

Captions

Captions are a text version of the media content that is synchronised with the video. There are two types of captions – open and closed. Open captions are always turned on, whereas closed captions can be turned on or off by the user. Captions help people who:

- Are in a noisy environment
- Have trouble understanding a speaker's accent
- Prefer to read along as they listen
- Speak a different language
- Have limited or no hearing
- Need to watch videos on mute due to their environment

Audio descriptions

An audio description is a separate audio track that describes important visual content, making it accessible to people who can't see what is happening in the video, for example facial expressions, movements or hand actions. Audio descriptions help people who:

- Have visual impairments
- Are auditory learners
- Are actively engaged in video viewing and so pay better attention
- Lack proficiency in the language
- Struggle with visual processing issues
- Are autistic and need more information on emotions and social cues

Find out more information on transcripts, captions and audio descriptions.

Flashing content

Your website should not contain anything that flashes more than 3 times per second as it can cause seizures or migraines. You can use the Trace Centre's Photosensitive Epilepsy Analysis Tool (PEAT) to check content that flashes meet the required standards.

Try the PEAT tool

Find out more information on flashing content.

5. Downloads

When adding documents / downloads remember that these must be accessible too.

Microsoft Word, Google docs and Apple Pages all have accessibility features built in. PDF's must have accessibility information such as headings, alt text and properties manually built in.

- Make sure your document uses headings, plain language and is easy to read.
- Limit the use of decorative fonts within the document and stick to ones that are easy to read online.
- Use paragraph formatting and don't add extra blank returns to create extra space as these create a poor experience for screen reader users.

- Check your use of colours complies with colour contrast accessibility standards.

Find out more information on creating accessible downloads.

Other useful resources

- Colour contrast checker to ensure you meet WCAG standards – visit WebAIM: Contrast Checker.

- Grammarly, a free online checker to ensure your language is clear and effective - Visit Grammarly website.

- WCAG guidelines Read the online guidelines about accessible standards.

Got a question on accessibility?

Remember the website group on Workplace is there for you to ask questions and discuss ideas. If you have a question around whether content is accessible feel free to post in the group.

Go to the group on Workplace group.