

Include everyone, keep everyone



Your guide to web
accessibility in Canada



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Join other like-minded leaders

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The power of the Web is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect.”

- **Tim Berners-Lee**, Inventor of the Internet

Include everyone, keep everyone

No matter where you live in Canada — from British Columbia to Newfoundland and Labrador — you’ve likely noticed ‘web accessibility’ becoming an area of greater focus for governments and organizations in recent years. We’ve seen federal accessibility legislation become law, the release of new statistics surrounding disability in Canada, and a growing public awareness of digital inclusivity as we approached the January 2021 deadline for Ontario web accessibility requirements.

Many will be surprised to learn that the number of Canadians who identify as having a disability is growing. In fact, 22% of Canadians aged 15 years and older have at least one disability that limits their everyday activities — that’s up from a reported 13% in 2012. These disabilities can be related to pain, flexibility, mobility, vision, hearing, dexterity, learning, memory, or development. People are enabled by assistive technologies, but your site may not be compatible.

Increasingly, our everyday tasks have shifted online, from ordering groceries, booking a ticket,

scheduling medical appointments, conducting banking, making reservations, and accessing information.

However, despite the growing prevalence of online tools, many websites have overlooked the needs of users with disabilities, resulting in lost business and frustrated users. Rather than ignore the diverse needs of users, we need to educate ourselves about digital accessibility. In Canada, we still have a long way to go, but we also have the opportunity to become leaders in inclusive technological innovation.

Over the next few pages, you’ll get a better understanding of Canada’s accessibility laws, the current state of accessibility in Canada, and how your organization can get started in becoming digitally inclusive.

By definition, web accessibility means that all web content is accessible — meaning it can be perceived, operated and understood — without barriers by people of **all abilities** and **disabilities**.





With an estimated worldwide population of **1.3 billion** — people with disabilities control over **\$8 trillion** in annual disposable income.

- [Return on Disability](#)

71%



of customers with accessibility needs will click away from a website that they find difficult to use.

- [Click Away Pound](#)

80%



of internet users with impairments will spend their money where they face the fewest barriers — not necessarily on the website that offers the cheapest products.

- [Click Away Pound](#)



Most businesses will be unaware that they are losing income due to inaccessibility, because more than **90%** of customers who have difficulty using a site will not contact them.

- [Click Away Pound](#)





22%

of Canadians aged 15 or older are living with at least one disability.

- [Statistics Canada](#)

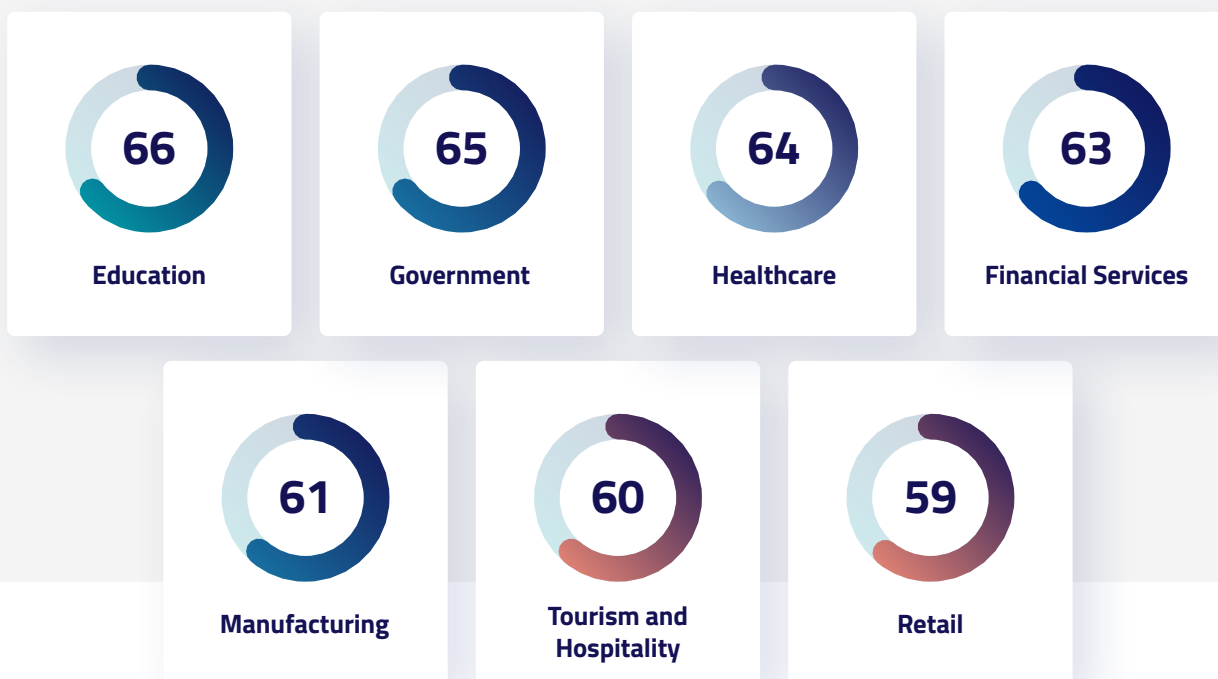
A timeline of accessibility in Canada

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- 2005** The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) becomes law
 - 2013** The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) becomes law
 - January 1**
 - 2014** The date by which new public websites, significantly refreshed websites, and any web content posted in Ontario after January 1, 2012 must meet WCAG 2.0 Level A
 - 2017** The Nova Scotia Accessibility Act becomes law
 - 2018** British Columbia proposes the British Columbia Accessibility Act (Bill M 219)
 - 2019** The Accessible Canada Act (ACA) becomes law
 - January 1**
 - 2021** The date by which all public websites and web content posted in Ontario after January 1, 2012 must meet WCAG 2.0 Level AA
 - 2023** AMA target date for Manitoba to become barrier-free
 - 2025** AODA target date for Ontario to become barrier-free
 - 2030** Nova Scotia Accessibility Act target date for Nova Scotia to become barrier-free
 - 2040** ACA target date for Canada to become barrier-free

Current state of web accessibility in Canada

Canada currently trails a number of developed nations, including the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, with an average accessibility score of **63/100**.

Accessibility score in Canada by industry



Data Source: Accessibility World Map.

Canadian industry scores: Education - 66, Government - 65, Healthcare - 64, Financial Services - 63, Manufacturing - 61, Tourism and Hospitality - 60, Retail - 59

When it comes to web accessibility by industry, retail in Canada ranks lowest with a score of 59, meaning that Canadian retailers may be missing out on a large percentage of potential customers. With an increasing amount of legislation throughout the country that requires organizations to make their websites more accessible, it's clear that Canadian industries have a long way to go.

Accessibility scores are based on Siteimprove's Accessibility Digital Certainty Index (DCI). They are a measure of how well a website tests against web accessibility standards that have been set out in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1). A website's Accessibility Score is determined by the number of success criteria a site fulfills under the three WCAG conformance levels (A, AA, AAA).

3 steps for getting started with web accessibility

1 Review your content Are you creating a barrier?

The globally-recognized Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) — on which Canadian requirements are based — outline four main principles for web accessibility: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, and Robust (POUR).

Perceivable

Can everyone 'see' this?

All users — including those with full vision, low vision, or no vision — through the use of assistive technologies (screen readers, zoom magnification, high contrast tools), must be able to “see” or perceive what is being presented on a web page, application, or document.

Common barriers include: images missing alternative text, videos that do not provide closed captioning or textual transcripts, web pages designed without a meaningful sequence and logical order, insufficient colour contrast, using only colour to identify important content or actions.

Operable

Can everyone operate this?

A web page, application or document can be navigated fully using not only a mouse, but also by using a keyboard, switch controls, and other devices.

Common barriers include: web pages that are not navigable by keyboard or switch controls, no “skip-to” links to allow keyboard users to jump directly to a content section, no helpful page titles or headings, and use of an automatic timer or auto-playing media with no way to control it.

Understandable

Can everyone understand this?

All information — including language and interface operation instructions — must be understandable to all users.

Common barriers include: inconsistent navigation or information placement, unclear or confusing error messages, overuse of abbreviations, content with a high reading level, undefined page language, and missing labels and instructions for buttons or controls.

Robust

Can all devices use this?

Content — and the way a page or application is coded — must be robust enough to be used on emerging technologies (web, mobile, tablet, wearables) and interpreted by a wide variety of user agents, including assistive technologies (screen readers, page magnification, Braille displays, keyboards, switch controls).

Common barriers include: web pages that are not compatible with commonly used assistive technologies, status messages and errors that are not available for non-visual users, sizes that are not responsive to all devices.

2

Empower roles in your organization How does your team contribute?

We all play a role in creating an accessible digital presence. Make sure you know your roles and responsibilities when it comes to removing and preventing barriers.

These are your employees who need to think inclusively everyday:

Marketing Leadership

- Ensure accessibility is included in every campaign and that it adheres to accessibility guidelines
- Procure tools, software, and third-party resources that assist the team in improving accessibility
- Champion the ROI on accessibility and inclusive content within the organization

Content Writers, Editors, Authors

- Use alternative text to describe the context of images
- Use proper headings, labels, plain language descriptions, and instructions for easy navigation
- Include transcripts and captions for all audio and video
- Create accessible Word documents and PDFs

User Experience (UX) Designers

- Use accessible page layout designs
- Consider the different ways a user may interact with the website, including keyboard, mouse, screen reader, and switch control
- Include "skip-to" links, landmarks, and page sections
- Create design pattern documents for consistency
- Ensure website is responsive for tablets and mobile

Creative Designers

- All images and icons should have sufficient colour contrast
- Use fonts, buttons, and icons that are scalable and an appropriate size
- Ensure colour alone is not used to convey a message, symbol or instruction
- Design infographics to be simple and effective, or create text-only alternatives
- Create a style guide for consistency

Developers and Webmasters

- Ensure CSS is updated
- Ensure Javascript is not causing barriers to keyboard or switch controls
- Use semantic HTML markup wherever possible and ARIA roles and attributes only when necessary
- Test pages using accessibility tools in different browsers
- Conduct assistive technology testing with screen readers, keyboards, zoom magnification, high contrast tools, and colour contrast checkers

3

Design for everyone Inclusive design is good design

The following are a few important areas of web accessibility to help you and your team create a more inclusive website.

Readability

Best practices say to aim for the reading level of a 12-year-old. Learning disabilities are one of the most common types of disabilities among Canadian youth, and very often impact their reading level. This also helps those whose first language is not English or French. Make sure the content on your website is plain and informal, but avoid the overuse of clichés and colloquial language. Keep sentences as short as possible. Always write in an active voice.

Headings

Assistive technologies, like screen readers, rely on heading tags to scan a website and understand its structure. Using the correct heading tags (h1, h2, h3, etc.) allows users to quickly and effectively navigate your website and the hierarchy of its content.

Images

Make sure the images on your site contain alternative (alt) text. For Canadians who use a screen reader, alt text explains the content or context of the image. Avoid embedding text inside images, because screen readers cannot render it. It is best to code text separately, on top of the image.

Links

Canadians using screen readers often navigate from link to link, which means hyperlinked text can be presented out of context. For example, calls-to-action like “Click here” do not tell the user where those links actually lead. Instead, use phrases like “Learn more about Siteimprove” which tell the user what to expect.

Audio & Video

Without captions or transcripts for your videos or podcasts, you could be excluding the 3.15 million Canadians who identify as being hard-of-hearing. Video captions aid deaf or hard-of-hearing Canadians to watch video content and read along at the same time. Similarly, transcripts enable your podcasts to be read, thus ensuring your audience stays up-to-date with your content.

Colour

Many Canadians live with colour blindness or low vision. In order to meet WCAG Level AA requirements, your foreground and background colours need to have a 4.5:1 contrast ratio. Designs that are high contrast are clearer for most visitors, but ensure the brightness of a background isn't overwhelming for others. If it's not, there may need to be an adjustment made to your brand palette. That's why it's important to consider accessibility and colour contrast when establishing your brand guidelines.



When user experience doesn't consider all users' experience it should be called Some Users' Experience. Yes, SUX."

- **Billy Gregory**, The Paciello Group



Working for a company dedicated to helping marketers build personalized content experiences for their customers, it is so important that people have access to every format of content and that experiences are inclusive for all audiences. Uberflip has made accessibility a company-wide initiative to ensure that we make good on our promise to always deliver remarkable experiences. The goal is for our workplace, product, and content to be free from limitations and accessible for all.

I urge organizations to make accessibility a priority. Assemble an accessibility team that consists of champions from all departments and take on every new project with an inclusive lens. Being accessible is just good business."

- **Paige Gerber**, Senior Director of Content Experience at Uberflip

Join other **like-minded**
LEADERS

Thank you for reading

Siteimprove is driven by the desire to help customers make the most of their digital presence. We provide the knowledge and tools they need to help make the internet better and more inclusive for all. As the digital world becomes more complex, it's crucial for organizations to maintain an error-free, consistent, up-to-date, and accessible digital presence. Our intelligent automation software and best-in-class customer support have helped more than 7,500 organizations worldwide manage, maintain and improve their efforts to become digital leaders.

Here are some other resources you may find helpful:

**A complete overview of
Canada's accessibility laws**

*Learn more about Canada's laws, including
dates & penalties for non-compliance*

**The all-in-one digital
accessibility e-book**

*Tips and expert insights on how
to create an inclusive website*

Request a demo

*Get an overview of your
website's accessibility issues*

