



Accessibility (a11y) 101

For Healthcare Marketers



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Legal Disclaimer

- Everything you learn here today is for educational purposes only.
- If you are seeking legal advice regarding accessibility, please consult a civil rights attorney or other legal professional.



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The Business Case for Accessibility

- It's the right thing to do
- It's the law
- Patients with disabilities are more likely to need healthcare
- Coding web content for accessibility also boosts SEO
- Improving accessibility improves user experience
- If done well, it could be your competitive edge



Photo from [Children's Hospital of Richmond](#)

Accessibility Laws in the U.S.

The Rehabilitation Act – Section 504

Applies to organizations that receive federal financial assistance, such as:

- Schools and universities
- Hospitals and healthcare providers
- Non-profit organizations
- Government agencies
- Etc.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – Title II

Applies to state and local government programs:

- State and local government offices (food assistance, employment services, etc.)
- Public schools, community colleges, and public universities
- State and local police departments
- State and local courts
- Public hospitals and public healthcare clinics
- Public parks, recreation programs, and libraries
- Public transit agencies
- Etc.

Accessibility Laws in the U.S. (continued)

Prior to 2024:

- Companies confused about their responsibilities due to vague laws
- Consumers frustrated with the lack of accessible websites
- Lawsuits for inaccessible websites rise

In 2024 and moving forward

- Formal rules issued mandating **WCAG 2.1 A and AA standards for web content, mobile apps, and kiosks**
- Requirements are mirrored for ADA and The Rehabilitation Act – recipients covered under both now have many of the same obligations
- Clear compliance deadlines have been set

Section 504 Compliance Deadlines

Number of Employees	Compliance Date
0 to 14	May 10, 2027
15+	May 11, 2026

Fast approaching deadline

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) expects:

- Entities to budget, plan, develop, and test their web accessibility improvements in advance
- WCAG compliance is not intended to be a last-minute fix

Section 504 Compliance Deadlines

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List of Section 504 Exceptions

A few limited exceptions do not need to meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA:

1. Archived Web Content
2. Pre-existing Conventional Electronic Documents
3. Content Posted by a Third Party
4. Individualized Password-Protected Documents
5. Pre-existing social media posts



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WCAG 2.1 AA

W3C Recommendation

Later Versions of Accessibility Guidelines

1. **Perceivable**
 - 1.1 Text Alternatives
 - 1.1.1 Non-text Content
 - 1.2 Time-based Media
 - 1.2.1 Audio-only and Video-only (Prerecorded)
 - 1.2.2 Captions (Prerecorded)
 - 1.2.3 Audio Description or Media Alternative (Prerecorded)
 - 1.2.4 Captions (Live)
 - 1.2.5 Audio Description (Prerecorded)
 - 1.2.6 Sign Language (Prerecorded)
 - 1.2.7 Extended Audio Description (Prerecorded)
 - 1.2.8 Media Alternative (Prerecorded)
 - 1.2.9 Audio-only (Live)
 - 1.3 Adaptable
 - 1.3.1 Info and Relationships
 - 1.3.2 Meaningful Sequence
 - 1.3.3 Sensory Characteristics
 - 1.3.4 Orientation
 - 1.3.5 Identify Input Purpose
 - 1.3.6 Identify Purpose
 - 1.4 Distinguishable
 - 1.4.1 Use of Color
 - 1.4.2 Audio Control
 - 1.4.3 Contrast (Minimum)
 - 1.4.4 Resize Text
 - 1.4.5 Images of Text
 - 1.4.6 Contrast (Enhanced)
 - 1.4.7 Low or No Background Audio
 - 1.4.8 Visual Presentation
 - 1.4.9 Images of Text (No Exception)
 - 1.4.10 Reflow
 - 1.4.11 Non-text Contrast
 - 1.4.12 Text Spacing

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1

[W3C Recommendation 06](#)

▼ More details about this document

This version:

<https://www.w3.org/TR/2025/REC->

Latest published version:

<https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>

Latest editor's draft:

<https://w3c.github.io/wcag/guidelin>

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<https://www.w3.org/standards/hist>

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<https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>

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[GitHub w3c/wcag](#) (pull requests, r

[public-agwg-comments@w3.org](#) v

Errata:

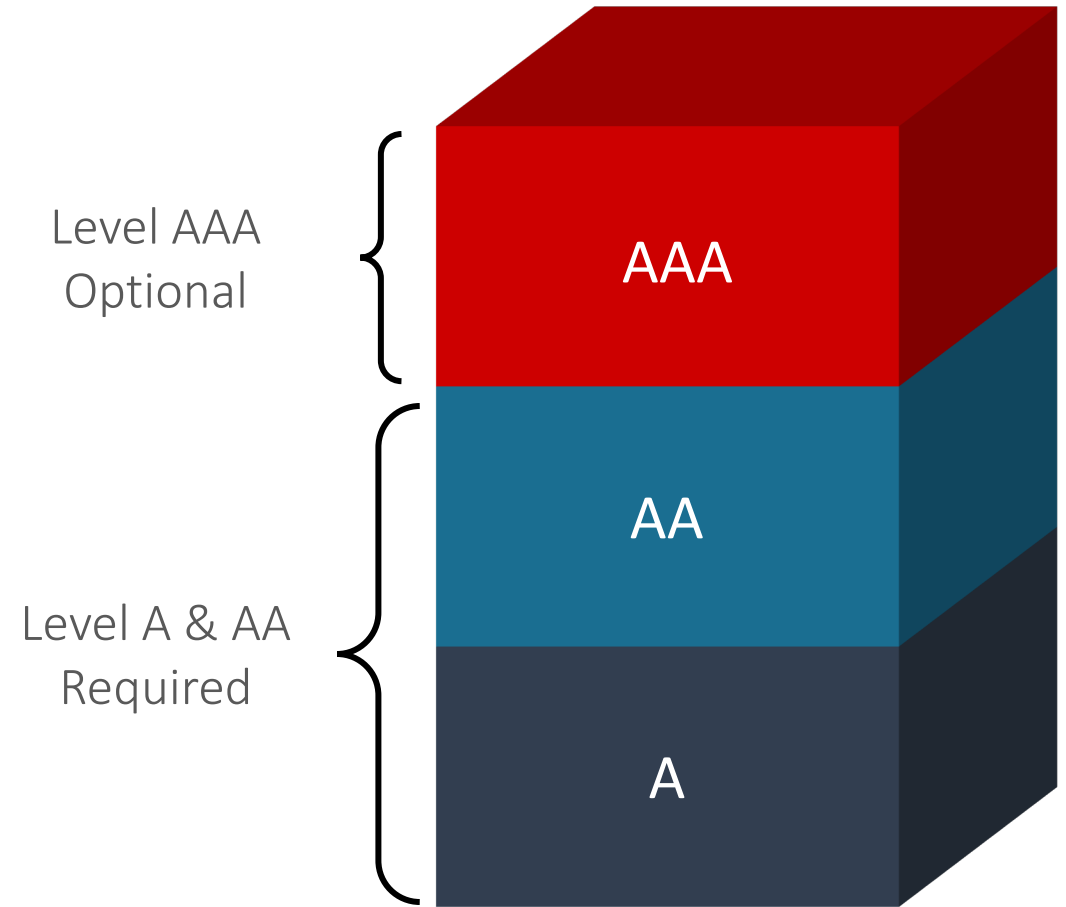
[Errata exists.](#)

See also [translations](#).

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WCAG Conformance Levels

- WCAG has 3 conformance levels (A, AA, and AAA)
- Each level builds upon the previous level, requiring a larger number of criteria to be met for higher accessibility standards
- To meet AA compliance, you must meet all single A and AA requirements



Six Common A11y Mistakes



Alternative (alt) Text

#1. Images and alternative text

Rules:

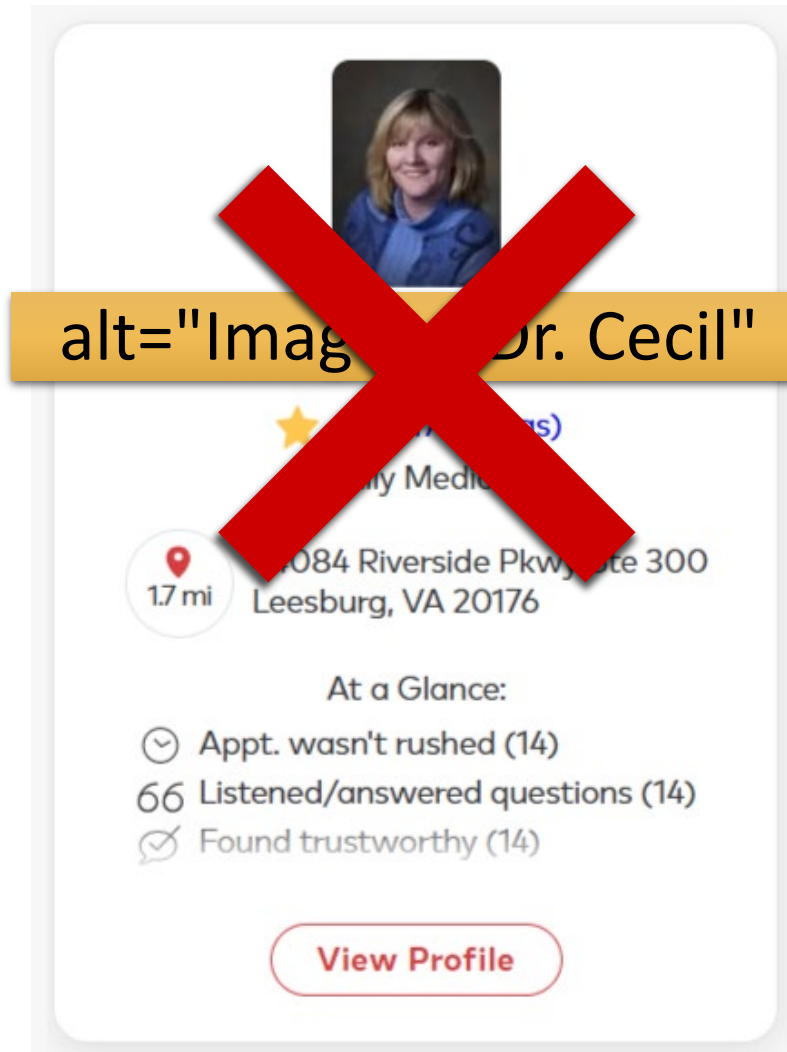
- All images must have an alt attribute in the markup (code), but not all need to have alt text.
- If an image is decorative, or the information is already provided in text somewhere else on the page, then alt text is not required.
- To mark an image as decorative, simply leave the alt attribute empty, or in some editors there may be a checkbox to mark images as decorative.

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Alt Text Example



When writing alt text:

- Do not include the words “image” or “photo”. Screen-reading tools will already announce the object as a graphic.
- If the alt text is not describing the photo, simply listing the physician’s name again it’s adding unnecessary noise for screen reader users.
- Keep alt text at 125 characters or less. Screen-reading tools typically stop reading alt text around that point.

Good Alt Text Example



alt="Image of Dr. Cecil"

OK

- Compliant, but uses the word “image” and is not

alt=" "

OK

- Compliant, image is marked as decorative
- Does not add extra noise by providing un-useful information

alt=“Headshot of Mary Cecil wearing a blue sweater ”

Good

- Compliant
- “Headshot” implies professional photo of shoulders and up
- “wearing a blue sweater” adds info that is not already provided via text on the page

Color Contrast

#2. Low text to background contrast

Rules:

- WCAG requires a text to background contrast ratio of:
 - 4.5:1 for normal text
 - 3:1 for large text (14 point and bold, or 18+ point and larger)



Color Contrast Examples

Teal text on light teal background

✗

Darker teal text on lighter teal background

✓

White text on lime green background

✗

Dark grey text on same lime-green background

✓

Yellow text on blue background

✗

Same yellow text on darker blue background

✓

Text Over Images or Video

#3: Low text to background contrast on images or videos

Guidelines:

- Adding a drop shadow can improve text contrast, but it may not be enough
- The drop shadow should be clear enough to create a distinct boundary around the text, but not so blurred or large that it interferes with readability
- Will likely require manual testing
- May need different techniques for different backgrounds

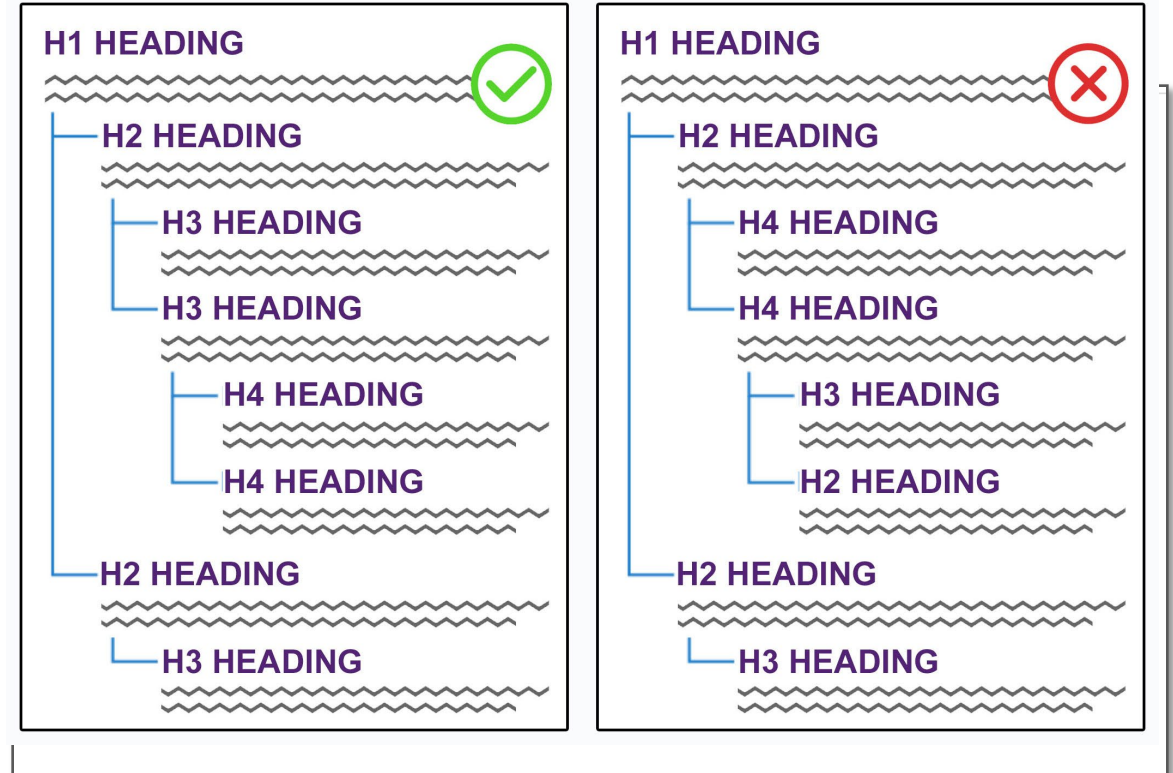


Headings

#4: Creating headings by changing font size

Rules:

- Text that acts as a heading must use appropriate heading tags (H1-H6)
- Every page should have an H1.
- Headings should not skip levels.
 - Example: If you start with an H1 and then skip to an H3 because it's visually more appealing, you are making it confusing for screen reader users.



Missing Heading Example

Headings are Important

Women's Diseases and Conditions

Breast Cancer

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet consectetur adipiscing elit. Quisque faucibus ex sapien vitae pellentesque sem placerat.

Menopause

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet consectetur adipiscing elit. Quisque faucibus ex sapien vitae pellentesque sem placerat.

Menstrual Conditions

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet consectetur adipiscing elit. Quisque faucibus ex sapien vitae pellentesque sem placerat.

Men's Diseases and Conditions

Prostate Cancer

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet consectetur adipiscing elit. Quisque faucibus ex sapien vitae pellentesque sem placerat.

Testicular Cancer

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Male Pattern Baldness

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Missing Heading Example: Tree View

A11y Examples

- 1 - Headings are Important
 - 2 - Women's Diseases and Conditions
 - 3 - Breast Cancer
 - 3 - Menopause
 - 3 - Menstrual Conditions
 - 3 - Prostate Cancer
 - 3 - Testicular Cancer
 - 3 - Male Pattern Baldness

Headings are Important

Women's Diseases and Conditions

Breast Cancer

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Male Pattern Baldness

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Input Methods




#5: Controls that ONLY work with a mouse

Rules:

- Digital assets must be entirely functional using only a **keyboard**
- Many users do not have the dexterity to use a mouse
- Some users prefer navigating with a keyboard for speed and efficiency
- Keyboard functionality is flexible, so if your asset works with a keyboard, it will also support speech input users, mouse users, and a wide variety of assistive technologies



Input Methods (continued)






Keyboard Accessibility

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Input methods



Keyboard Accessibility

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Common A11y Mistakes

Documents

#6: Inaccessible PDF documents

Rules:

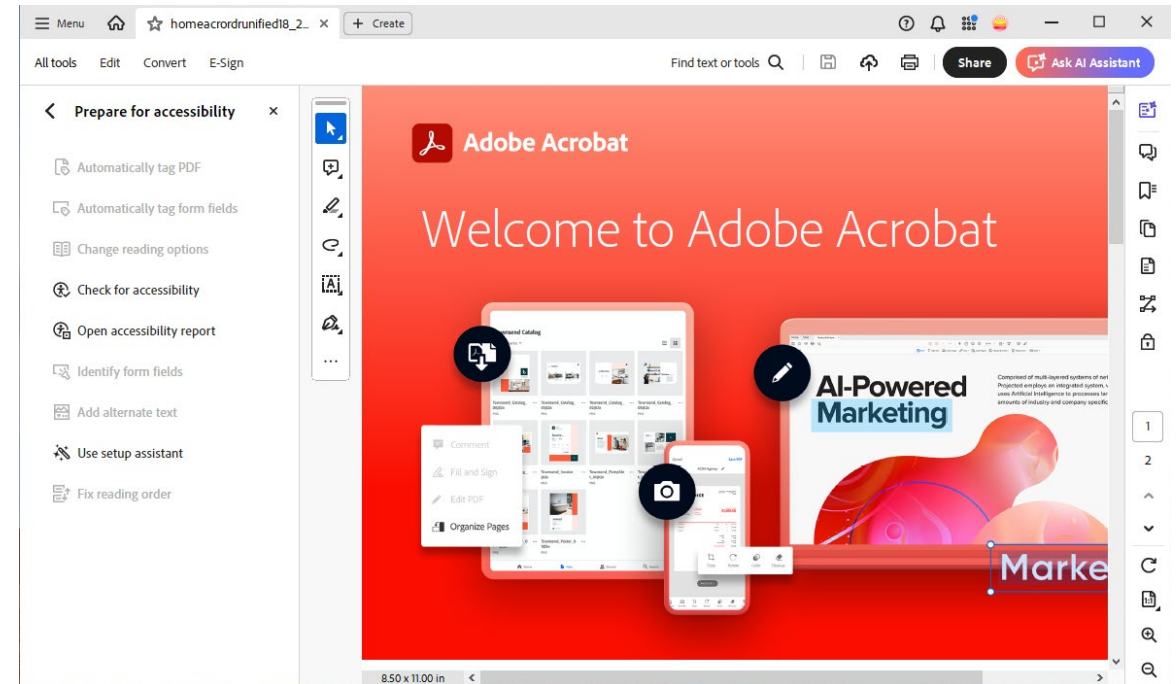
- All online content affiliated with your organization needs to be accessible. This includes:
 - PDFs
 - Word docs
 - Presentation files
 - and Spreadsheets



PDFs and Other Documents

For documents to be accessible they:

- Must be created and tagged in a way that supports accessibility
- Each document is essentially a web page and must comply with WCAG 2.1 level AA
- Most application software come with accessibility checkers to help make your documents accessible



Section 504 Exceptions



List of Section 504 Exceptions

A few limited exceptions do not need to meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA:

1. Archived Web Content
2. Pre-existing Conventional Electronic Documents
3. Content Posted by a Third Party
4. Individualized Password-Protected Documents
5. Pre-existing social media posts



Photo by [Stephen Walker](#) on [Unsplash](#)

1. Archived Web Content



Archived Web Content

Examples

Does not need to comply:

2018 Annual Report that is posted in a clearly labeled "Archive" section and used only for reference or recordkeeping.

Must comply:

If this content is updated after the organization's compliance date, the exception no longer applies.

Common Question

Does this mean I just need to move my whole site into an archive section?

Absolutely not

- Most of the content on a healthcare site is used to help patients find care/services. It would not qualify under this exception.
- Use this opportunity to assess your content:
 - Get rid of outdated or un-useful content
 - Update content when necessary
 - Archive historic content



2. Pre-existing Conventional Electronic Documents



**GIFT SHOP OPEN HOUSE
AND HOLIDAY SALE**

The Lane Gift Shop will host an Open House and Holiday Sale on Tuesday Dec. 3rd and Wednesday, Dec. 4th from 8 AM to 6 PM. Come and enjoy 20% discounts throughout the store, refreshments, and daily drawings for gift items (*with purchase*).

holiday decorations • jewelry
specialty gift items • stocking stuffers
clothing • baby items & more!

**DEC 3 & 4
8 AM TO 6 PM**

Lane Gift Shop
6300 Main Street
Zachary, LA

THE LANE GIFT SHOP IS
LOCATED JUST INSIDE
THE HOSPITAL FROM THE
MAIN ENTRANCE.

Lane Regional Medical Center
Auxiliary/Volunteer Services

www.lanermc.org

Examples

Does not need to comply:

A PDF advertising a gift shop sale that already took place and was posted to your site before your compliance date.

Must comply:

A PDF advertising a current or upcoming gift shop sale, even if it was posted to your website before your site’s compliance date.

3. Content Posted by a Third Party

Rules

- All content posted by a third party, unless the third party is posting due to contractual, licensing, or other arrangements with the recipient.

Examples

Does not need to comply:

A message that a member of the public posts on your online message board or social media posts.

Must comply:

ER wait times posted on your site by a third-party (such as MyChart).

4. Individualized documents that are password-protected



Services Provided at:
CENIC CALIFORNIA CAMPUS -
PO BOX 742892
Los Angeles, CA 90074-2892

Matthew Johnson
PO BOX 750
ANYTOWN, NY 10191

For billing inquiries, please contact us at 855-398-1633.
Office hours Monday through Friday 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM.
You may email us at S3ContactCenterCBO@sutterhealth.org.

Patient Name		Patient Account #
Johnson, Matthew		750334213

Date of Bill	Admit Date	Discharge Date
03/19/19	01/11/19	01/11/19

Insurance Company
United Healthcare - United Healthcare Choice

SAMPLE Hospital Bill

Summary of Account		
Charges		
Rev Code	Description	Amount
0250	PHARMACY - GENERAL CLASSIFICATION	75.00
0300	LABORATORY - GENERAL CLASSIFICATION	475.00
0450	EMERGENCY ROOM - GENERAL CLASSIFICATION	3,450.00
Total Charges		75,000.00
1 Billed Charges		75,000.00
Payments and Adjustments		
Date	Description	Amount
03/20/19	UNITED HEALTHCARE - PATIENT INSURANCE	-75,000.00

Examples

Does not need to comply:

A PDF of a patient’s medical bill available inside the patient’s secured portal (typically exported for their own records)

Must comply:

That same medical bill, inside the same portal, but in **HTML format** (typically in the user interface)

5. Pre-existing social media posts

Rules

- Pre-existing social media posts that were posted before the date your organization is required to comply.
- Social media posts made on or after your organization's compliance date must be accessible.

Note

While social media posts must be accessible, your organization is not responsible for ensuring that the various social media platforms themselves conform to WCAG 2.1 Level AA

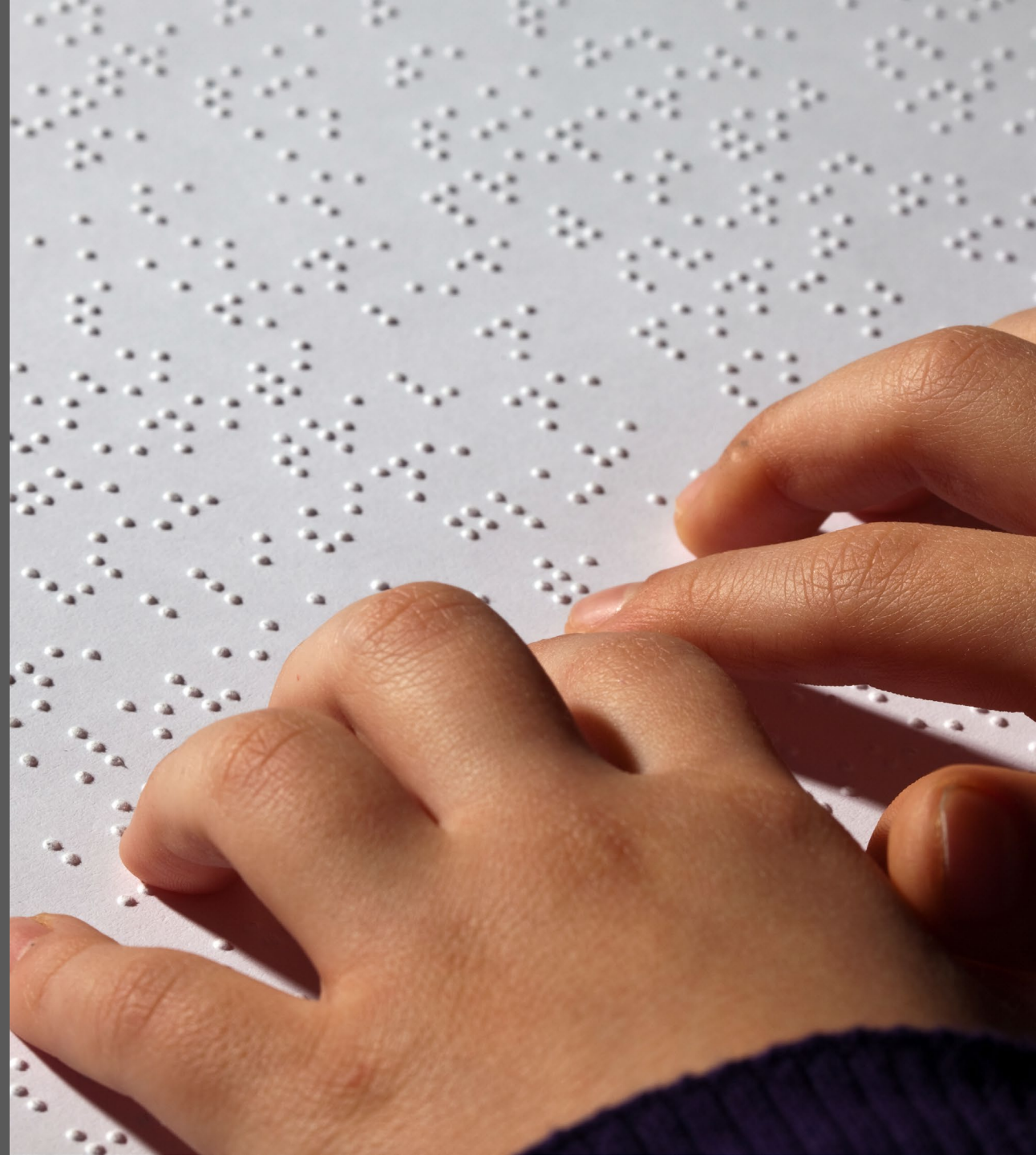
Making Social Media Posts Accessible

- Alt text for images
- If images contain text – the text must meet contrast requirements
- Video posts must provide captions & audio descriptions
- Links need to be concise, yet descriptive
- Charts/Graphs/Infographics will need full text descriptions to provide the same content in a non-visual format

This is not an exhaustive list – please refer to WCAG 2.1



Getting Started



Accessibility Is Everyone's Responsibility

Compliance is a shared responsibility and will require cross-team collaboration

- Execs: Prioritize accessibility throughout the organization
- Managers: Offer training for employees and provide extra time to make assets accessible
- IT: Ensure procured products are accessible
- Legal teams: Evaluate policies and disclaimers
- Marketing team: Ensure website, social media, and other digital assets are accessible



Action Steps



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- High level a11y audit of digital assets
 - Websites, apps, kiosks, bill pay and 3rd party applications
 - Don't forget PDFs and online documents
- Evaluate your team's knowledge and provide training
- Put together an A11y committee
 - Include designers, writers, developers, managers, and stakeholders
- Make and plan and prioritize the work
- Take pride in your efforts



Questions?

www.stamats.com/contact/ | info@stamats.com

Amplify *Opportunity*

Accessibility audits for healthcare marketers. Improve compliance, SEO, and patient experience, starting with your key web pages.

[Contact us](#) to get started.

Links to related resources:

- White paper: [Meeting HHS Section 504 Accessibility Standards](#)
- [What the New HHS Rule Means for Healthcare Websites](#)
- [4 PDF Accessibility Tips](#)