

REPORT TITLE: **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act – Website Compliance**

FROM: Kathryn Lockyer, Interim Commissioner of Corporate Services

RECOMMENDATION

That the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility be requested to extend the compliance deadline for website accessibility by one year to January 1, 2022 to allow public sector organization to meet the compliance requirements.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) was introduced in 2005 with the goal of creating a fully accessible Ontario by 2025.
 - To help achieve this goal, the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation* (IASR), was introduced which contains a grouping of five standards that assist to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities.
 - Under the Information and Communications Standard, there are certain requirements that designated public sector organizations must meet related to website accessibility.
 - The timeline for meeting the requirements is January 1, 2021.
 - The response to the COVID-19 pandemic caused a shift in focus, priorities and resources, forcing the work related to website accessibility to pause.
 - A 12-month extension is being requested.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) has been active in Ontario since 2005. The AODA was introduced with the goal of creating a fully accessible Ontario by 2025. This law mandates that organizations must follow a set of standards to become more accessible to people with disabilities. The AODA applies to all levels of government, private sector, and non-profit organizations.

Under the AODA there are a set of five standards that make up the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation* (IASR) (O.Reg. 191/11). The five standards include:

- Customer Service
- Employment
- Information and Communication
- Transportation
- Design of Public Spaces

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Each of these standards include requirements that all organizations must meet, with deadlines specific to an organization's type and size. The Information and Communication Standard of the IASR includes compliance standards specific to websites and web content:

14(2) Designated public sector organizations and large organizations shall make their internet websites and web content conform with the World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, initially at Level A and increasing to Level AA, and shall do so in accordance with the schedule set out in this section.

(4) Designated public sector organizations and large organizations for their internet websites shall meet the requirements of this section in accordance with the following schedule:

1. By January 1, 2014, new internet websites and web content on those sites must conform with WCAG 2.0 Level A.
2. By January 1, 2021, all internet websites and web content must conform with WCAG 2.0 Level AA, other than
 - i. Success criteria 1.2.4. Captions (Live), and,
 - ii. Success criteria 1.2.5. Audio Descriptions (Pre-recorded).

The World Wide Web Consortium, in cooperation with individuals and organizations around the world develop Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) with the goal of providing a single shared standard for web content accessibility that meets the needs of individuals, organizations, and governments internationally. This includes making web content more accessible to people with disabilities. It involves the creation of standards that are designed to apply broadly to different Web technologies now and in the future, built with specific success criteria which indicate the level to which web content must comply to be rated as compliant.

2. Current Status

Since the introduction of the new web template in 2015, the Region of Peel has introduced several front-end enhancements to make content more accessible and meet WCAG 2.0 Level AA compliance. In March 2020, work on website accessibility was reduced due to pandemic priorities and redeployed resources who were shifted to manage COVID-19 communications.

Across the organization, staff have historically used PDFs as a way to expedite publishing and secure content, and as such, the scope of inaccessible PDF assets (PDFs that are not in computer-readable formats, not mobile-friendly) on peelregion.ca is vast. The peelregion.ca domain currently does not have a web content lifecycle management system. Without this capability, all content (webpages, images, PDFs, etc.) uploaded to peelregion.ca remain without governance.

An audit of the website was recently conducted by vendor AbleDocs, and data was pulled to inform a PDF reduction and compliance strategy.

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a) PDF Reduction

PDFs have been sorted by Program area, those most accessed, date of posting and by accessibility rating. This information has identified assets that can be safely removed with little to nil impact to partners and residents across the Region of Peel. Meetings are in progress with groups to discuss this process and rethink ineffective practices.

b) Compliance Strategy

New practices to ensure that outdated PDF assets meet compliance include installing automated tools that generate compliant PDF files, on-demand remediation and providing alternative formats of content. A corporate policy to ensure that content placed on the site is accessible is underway.

The COVID-19 response has caused some of this work to pause. A shift in priorities, reallocation of resources and change in focus to address the needs brought on by the pandemic were some of the factors that impeded this work from moving forward. The current status of remediating and/or reducing the number of PDF assets is at 20% complete. An additional 10-12 months is required for a full and comprehensive remediation of these assets and to conform with the legislated requirements.

3. Next Steps

The immediate steps being taken to meet compliance are as follows:

a) New Tools

New tools are being implemented that can produce accessible PDFs that meet requirements. New practices could include:

- Automated tools that crawl site and report on accessibility of documents
- Provide alternative formats of content
- On-demand remediation
- Tools that generate compliant PDF files in one click

In addition to the above, all media assets posted to the site will be reviewed using Accessibility Checkers.

b) Change Management

We are meeting with staff across the organization to brief them on AODA requirements, pull data to inform strategic decisions about reducing scope of PDFs and rethink ineffective practices such as using peelregion.ca as an archive.

c) New Website

Rolling out beginning 2021, the new peelregion.ca offers users a high-contrast design and common look throughout representing the organization's updated Brand. The site, built on Drupal 8 Content Management System (CMS), features usability and accessibility enhancements including the increased usage of breadcrumbs and the ability to reach pages from different places, improved ability to browse with keyboard

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and ease of navigation on mobile devices. The new CMS also features expiration dates to aid with content governance.

d) Digital Champions Network and Publishers

Staff who have been identified as Digital Champions and Divisional Publishers are core audiences that will be leveraged as a way to educate and inform and identify potential challenges and unique attributes of various divisions and departments.

4. Moving Forward

Long term plans include:

- a)** Establish beneficial partnership with Digital Marketing & AAC (beta testing, ongoing consult, etc.).
- b)** Develop corporate policy to ensure content placed on site is accessible.
- c)** Work with stakeholders on records management accountability. Note that new website features expiration dates to aid with content governance.
- d)** Continue to develop guidelines to rethink ineffective practices, like using peelregion.ca as an archive.
- e)** Training sessions advising on methods to create compliant documents with groups that regularly author and publish content.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

Not meeting the compliance timeline is a legal and financial liability, as well as a reputational risk. A website that is compliant with the AODA is mandatory for businesses over 50 people in Ontario. After January 1, 2021, non-compliance can result in fines of \$50,000 per day for Directors and Officers and fines of up to \$100,000 per day for the organization.

CONCLUSION

The Region of Peel realizes the importance of accessibility and inclusion and ensuring that our properties, including digital, are accessible by persons of all abilities. Ongoing accessibility work on peelregion.ca was paused in 2020 due to the pandemic. Resources were redeployed internally to manage emergency communications. At this time, there is a risk that the Region of Peel could fail to meet the January 1, 2021 legislated requirements and be ordered into compliance, face administrative penalties, or both. While accessibility is based on an 100% accessibility rating, status of this project is as follows:

- Regional Government - 90% compliant with exception to section of legacy HTML and PDFs on Agendas, Minutes and Reports, By-laws and Decisions newsletter
- News & Media - 90%
- Contact Us -100%
- Public Works - 70%
- Human Services - 85%
- Health Services - 20%

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The Region of Peel will continue in its efforts to comply, however, an additional 10-12 months is required for a full and comprehensive remediation of these assets and to conform with the legislated requirements. A one-year extension is being requested.

For further information regarding this report, please contact:

Lisa Duarte, Director, Marketing and Communications, Ext. 4862, lisa.duarte@peelregion.ca

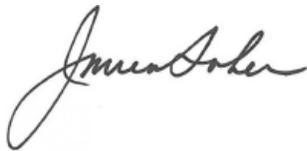
Juliet Jackson, Director, Culture & Inclusion, Ext. 6741, juliet.jackson@peelregion.ca

Authored By: Shauna Marshall, Manager Digital Marketing & Communications and Veronica Montesdeoca, Accessibility Planning Specialist.

Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:

Department Commissioner and Division Directors.

Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.



J. Baker, Chief Administrative Officer