Implementation of upgraded accessibility standard across Australian Government websites

To all agencies under the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997 (FMA Act)

Should an agency wish to opt-out from a Whole-of-Government arrangement, approval must be sought from the Expenditure Review Committee (ERC). Please refer to Estimates Memorandum – 2010/02 issued 14 January 2010 for a detailed outline of the opt-out process.

Purpose

To provide guidance on the requirement for all websites to conform to the upgraded website accessibility standard, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.0 (WCAG 2.0) Level AA, by December 2014.

This circular replaces the requirement to conform to WCAG 1.0 as detailed in the Government Online Strategy of April 2000.

Key points

1. Through decisions of the Online and Communications Council (OCC) and the Secretaries’ ICT Governance Board (SIGB), it is required that all websites must:
   a. Conform to WCAG 2.0 Level A by 31 December 2012; and
   b. Conform to WCAG 2.0 Level AA by 31 December 2014.

2. ‘Websites’, for this purpose, include all websites owned and/or operated by an FMA Act agency under any domain, including external (public-facing or private) and internal (closed community, including intranet) websites.


4. The detailed scope of the upgrade required is described in the NTS. In general, agencies should only upgrade current, important information; legacy web content can be archived or decommissioned. New websites and website content created after July 2010 should be made WCAG 2.0 Level A conformant from launch to support the achievement of full Level A compliance by December 2012.
5. Agencies will be required to report to SIGB, through the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO), in the Department of Finance and Deregulation, on their progress towards WCAG 2.0 conformance in line with the timetable provided in the NTS.

6. AGIMO will assist agencies to achieve conformance through the provision of education materials and advice and guidance via the Web Guide and established communities.

Background

7. Developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), WCAG 2.0 is a technical standard which details the method and approach to make websites usable and understandable for people with a disability. Accessible websites are more usable for all people, including the elderly, people from linguistically or culturally different backgrounds and those in regional locations or with low internet bandwidth.

8. The standard comprises three conformance levels: A, AA and AAA. The higher levels are more difficult to achieve, but offer greater accessibility.

9. In November 2009, the Online and Communications Council (OCC) endorsed WCAG 2.0, requiring all Australian, state and territory government websites to conform to Level A by December 2012.

10. Further to the OCC endorsement, SIGB extended the requirement for FMA Act agencies to conform to Level AA by December 2014.


Action required

12. Agencies must ensure that all websites within scope of this Circular conform to the relevant level of WCAG 2.0 within the following timeframes:
   - WCAG 2.0 Level A by 31 December 2012
   - WCAG 2.0 Level AA by 31 December 2014

13. Agencies should ensure staff within web, communication, and information technology areas are appropriately educated on WCAG 2.0 and the NTS.

14. Agencies should begin implementing WCAG 2.0 and reporting on their progress by following the processes outlined in the NTS, seeking advice as necessary from AGIMO.

15. Agencies unable to achieve the approved timeframes or the mandated conformance levels must seek and obtain approval from the Expenditure Review Committee (ERC) as per instruction of Estimates Memorandum – 2010/02 issued 14 January 2010.
Contacts

16. If you have any questions regarding this AGIMO Circular, please contact Agency Services Division within AGIMO via email at wcag2@finance.gov.au or phone (02) 6215 1653.

Peter Alexander
A/g First Assistant Secretary
Agency Services Division
Australian Government Information Management Office
March 2011