



# AODA & WCAG 2.1 AA

## Website Compliance Checklist

For Canadian nonprofits, healthcare organisations, and public sector teams

Prepared by Pragmatica | [pragmati.ca](https://pragmati.ca) | Vancouver & Toronto

### About This Checklist

---

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) requires Ontario organisations with 50 or more employees to meet WCAG 2.0 Level AA for all web content. The Accessible Canada Act (ACA) applies to federally regulated entities and references WCAG 2.1 AA.

This checklist covers WCAG 2.1 AA — the current international standard — which satisfies both AODA and ACA requirements. It is organised into six categories: Structure, Visual Design, Keyboard & Navigation, Forms, Media, and Technical.

Important: Automated tools catch approximately 30–40% of real accessibility issues. This checklist is designed for manual review. Items marked with ★ require testing with a real screen reader (VoiceOver on macOS, NVDA on Windows).

### 1. Structure & Semantics

Heading hierarchy, page titles, landmarks

<input type="checkbox"/>	Each page has a unique, descriptive title tag <i>Format: Page Name   Organisation Name</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Each page has exactly one H1 heading
<input type="checkbox"/>	Headings follow a logical hierarchy (H1 → H2 → H3) without skipping levels
<input type="checkbox"/>	Heading text describes the content that follows — not decorative or vague <i>e.g. "Our Services" not "Welcome"</i>

<input type="checkbox"/>	Page language is declared in the HTML lang attribute <i>e.g. &lt;html lang="en"&gt; or &lt;html lang="fr"&gt;</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Landmark regions are used (header, nav, main, footer) ★ <i>Verify with screen reader navigation by landmarks</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Navigation landmarks are consistent across pages
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pages can be understood without CSS applied
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reading order in HTML matches the visual order on screen ★ <i>Test by tabbing through the page</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	No content is conveyed by visual position alone <i>e.g. "click the button on the right" is not accessible</i>

## 2. Visual Design & Colour

Contrast ratios, text sizing, colour independence

<input type="checkbox"/>	Normal text (under 18pt) has a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 against its background <i>Check with WebAIM Contrast Checker or Colour Contrast Analyser</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Large text (18pt or 14pt bold) has a contrast ratio of at least 3:1
<input type="checkbox"/>	UI components (buttons, inputs, icons) have at least 3:1 contrast against surroundings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Information is not conveyed by colour alone <i>e.g. error messages use text + colour, not colour alone</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Links are distinguishable from surrounding text by more than colour <i>Underline, bold, or 3:1 contrast against body text required</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Text can be resized to 200% without loss of content or functionality
<input type="checkbox"/>	No content is lost when text spacing is increased (line height 1.5x, letter spacing 0.12em)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Content does not require scrolling in two dimensions at 320px width <i>Exception: content that requires 2D layout (maps, data tables)</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focus indicators are visible with at least 3:1 contrast ratio ★ <i>Tab through the page and confirm every element shows a visible focus ring</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	No content flashes more than 3 times per second <i>Flashing content can trigger seizures</i>

## 3. Keyboard & Navigation

Focus management, skip links, interactive elements

<input type="checkbox"/>	All interactive elements are operable using a keyboard alone
--------------------------	--

	★ Test by navigating entire page with Tab, Shift+Tab, Enter, Space, and arrow keys
<input type="checkbox"/>	No keyboard trap exists ★ A user who tabs into a modal or widget can tab out without using a mouse
<input type="checkbox"/>	A visible skip navigation link is present at the top of each page e.g. "Skip to main content"
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focus order is logical and matches the visual reading order
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dropdown menus are operable by keyboard ★ Arrow keys should open and navigate dropdown items
<input type="checkbox"/>	Modal dialogs trap focus correctly inside the modal while open ★ Pressing Escape should close the modal
<input type="checkbox"/>	After a modal or dialog closes, focus returns to the element that triggered it
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom widgets (tabs, accordions, sliders) follow ARIA authoring practices
<input type="checkbox"/>	Single-key shortcuts can be remapped or turned off Applies if single character keyboard shortcuts are used
<input type="checkbox"/>	Session timeouts warn users and allow extension before expiry Minimum 20 seconds to respond to warning

## 4. Forms & Interactive Content

Labels, errors, instructions

<input type="checkbox"/>	Every form field has a programmatically associated label ★ Placeholder text alone does not meet this requirement
<input type="checkbox"/>	Required fields are identified in text (not by colour alone)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Error messages are specific and describe how to correct the error e.g. "Email address must include @" not "Invalid input"
<input type="checkbox"/>	Error messages are associated with the specific field that has the error ★ Screen readers should announce the error when the field receives focus
<input type="checkbox"/>	Form instructions appear before the form, not only after submission
<input type="checkbox"/>	Autocomplete attributes are set on personal data fields e.g. autocomplete="name", "email", "tel"
<input type="checkbox"/>	CAPTCHA has an accessible audio or text alternative
<input type="checkbox"/>	Donation and checkout forms work fully with keyboard navigation ★ Test entire transaction flow without a mouse
<input type="checkbox"/>	Success messages are announced to screen readers after form submission ★ Use a live region or move focus to the confirmation message

- ❑ PDF forms are tagged and readable by assistive technology  
*Scanned PDFs are images — they are not accessible*

## 5. Images, Video & Audio

Alt text, captions, audio descriptions

- ❑ All meaningful images have descriptive alt text  
*Alt text describes the content and purpose, not "image of..."*
- ❑ Decorative images have empty alt attributes (alt="")  
*This tells screen readers to skip the image entirely*
- ❑ Complex images (charts, graphs, infographics) have extended text descriptions  
*Either in the surrounding text or via longdesc/aria-describedby*
- ❑ Images of text are avoided except for logos  
*Real text is always preferred over text in images*
- ❑ All videos have accurate captions  
*Auto-generated captions must be reviewed and corrected*
- ❑ Captions are synchronised with audio  
*Captions should appear within 2 seconds of the audio*
- ❑ Pre-recorded videos have audio descriptions of visual content  
*Describes visual information not conveyed in the audio track*
- ❑ Audio-only content has a text transcript
- ❑ Videos do not autoplay with audio  
*Autoplaying audio that cannot be immediately stopped fails WCAG 2.1*
- ❑ Media players are operable by keyboard  
*★ Play, pause, volume, and captions controls must be keyboard accessible*

## 6. Technical & Code

Valid HTML, ARIA, assistive technology compatibility

- ❑ HTML is valid with no parsing errors that affect accessibility  
*Use the W3C Markup Validation Service to check*
- ❑ ARIA roles, states, and properties are used correctly  
*Incorrect ARIA is worse than no ARIA*
- ❑ Interactive elements have accessible names  
*★ All buttons, links, and inputs must have a name announced by screen readers*
- ❑ Icon buttons have accessible labels (aria-label or visually hidden text)  
*★ A magnifier icon button needs aria-label="Search"*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Status messages are announced without moving focus <i>Use aria-live regions for dynamic content updates</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Page does not use focus management that overrides default browser behaviour without purpose
<input type="checkbox"/>	Third-party widgets (booking systems, donation forms) meet the same standard as the main site
<input type="checkbox"/>	Site has been tested with VoiceOver (macOS/iOS) and NVDA (Windows) ★ <i>Manual screen reader testing is required — automated tools miss 60–70% of issues</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	An Accessibility Statement is published and linked from the footer
<input type="checkbox"/>	A feedback mechanism exists for users to report accessibility barriers

## Canadian Legal Reference

---

Legislation	Who It Applies To	Standard Required
AODA (Ontario)	Ontario orgs with 50+ employees	WCAG 2.0 Level AA (minimum)
Accessible Canada Act	Federally regulated entities	WCAG 2.1 Level AA
PIPEDA / CPPA	All Canadian orgs handling personal data	Privacy compliance (not WCAG)
ADA (US)	US orgs serving the public	WCAG 2.1 Level AA (de facto standard)

## Next Steps

---

1. Run an automated scan using WAVE ([wave.webaim.org](http://wave.webaim.org)) or axe DevTools as a starting point. Automated tools catch 30–40% of issues.
2. Manually test keyboard navigation on your most critical pages: homepage, contact, donation, and any booking or registration pages.
3. Test with a screen reader. VoiceOver is built into macOS and iOS. NVDA is free for Windows. Spend 20 minutes navigating your homepage and a form.
4. Address critical failures first: missing form labels, insufficient colour contrast, and keyboard traps are the most common and most consequential issues.
5. Publish an Accessibility Statement on your website documenting your commitment, the standard you are working toward, any known issues, and how to report barriers.

## About Pragmatica

Pragmatica is a Canadian web design agency based in Vancouver and Toronto. Since 2004, we have built accessible, high-performance websites for Canadian nonprofits, healthcare organisations, and professional associations. We build all sites to WCAG 2.1 AA as standard and offer accessibility audits for existing websites.

Need an accessibility audit or a WCAG-compliant website? [Contact us at pragmati.ca/contact](https://pragmati.ca/contact)