At Accessible360, we are often contacted by healthcare organizations that are misinformed or confused on the topic of digital accessibility and how it impacts their patient-facing websites, apps and other digital properties. While healthcare organizations obviously represent a diverse set of stakeholders using a complex array of technology, the principles and approaches to digital accessibility are straightforward if properly addressed.
WHAT IS DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY?

Digital accessibility is the inclusive practice of removing barriers that prevent interaction with websites and apps for people with disabilities. In a practical sense, it means that websites, apps and documents must be programmed in a way that provides methods for accessible technology to access this content.
Some examples include:

**Screen Readers**: Screen readers allow someone who is blind or has low vision to access digital content. For example, a screen reader will audibly read content from a web page to a user. While paragraphs are easily read, more dynamic content such as menus, modal dialogs, image sliders and others become much more complicated. There are ways for these dynamic sites to give "hints" to screen readers as to how the content should be read. This is done through standard HTML development (for websites), but is often not included during site development.

**Keyboard Only**: Some users may not have the dexterity to use a mouse, but can use a keyboard or a keyboard-like device to access content. That means that a site needs to be navigable using only keys. Issue arise where menus can only be accessed via a mouse, mouseover "hints" and other techniques.

**Text Magnification**: Many people lose the ability to read smaller content as they age. The option to increase the font size on your phone is an example of an accessible technology for these users. Many sites and apps do not wrap text correctly as font sizes increase, which renders the content unreadable.

**Disabilities fall into four categories**: Visual, Auditory, Physical, Cognitive. It is important that your applications take all of these au-
IMPACT

Making sites and apps accessible can make your content usable for a huge number of people that may otherwise not be able to access it.
This includes the following:

- 19% of the US population has a disability based on the 2010 U.S. census
- 1 in 10 men are colorblind
- 10,000 people turn 65 every day
- A group with $544 billion in spending power annually

Furthermore, it is the law. Any Title II entities (i.e., government agencies and those who receive government funding) are required by law to be compliant/accessible but most are not. Those who receive Medicare or Medicaid funding, education or public school support and all state and federal government agencies are Title II entities. Making your sites and apps accessible can have other positive impacts as well. Digital properties that are well organized and coded correctly for disabled users often result in applications that are more usable for all of your users while also being easier to maintain in the long run.

Digital accessibility also makes good business sense. Equitable access helps close the digital divide and improves quality of life for millions of people. With digital accessibility, your healthcare organization can:

- Maximize profits by welcoming everyone into your audience, particularly those that need to access health-related services
- Help to retain the aging baby boomers who are increasingly reliant on digital technology
- Build goodwill toward your brand from people with disabilities, along with their friends and families
- Proactively establish digitally accessible processes and content, reducing both legal and development costs — rather than addressing issues reactively
Digital accessibility testing is based on a set of standards that guide which issues are flagged as problems, how those issues are categorized and what success criteria can be used to evaluate successful remediation.
**Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)**

WCAG is used almost universally to guide the development of sites and other digital properties. These are the guidelines Accessible360 uses for our audits. Each issue found during an audit is linked back to one of the WCAG guidelines.

From the W3C WCAG site
(https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/):

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) is developed through the W3C process in cooperation with individuals and organizations around the world, with a goal of providing a single shared standard for web content accessibility that meets the needs of individuals, organizations, and governments internationally.

The WCAG documents explain how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. Web “content” generally refers to the information in a web page or web application, including:

- natural information such as text, images, and sounds
- code or markup that defines structure, presentation, etc.

WCAG 2.0 has 12 guidelines with testable success criteria, which are at three levels: A, AA, and AAA. Healthcare organizations are already required by law to comply with WCAG 2.0 AA, but many medical providers and other healthcare-related websites are not compliant, and do not offer people with disabilities the same conveniences and experience that they do for others.
A Practical Approach to Digital Accessibility

Accessible360 believes in a practical, process-oriented approach to achieving digital accessibility and staying accessible for the long run. We understand that digital accessibility is not something that is going to be accomplished overnight in modern, complex healthcare organizations. Content is created via code, content managers, integrations, third parties and others. Successful organizations coordinate all of these aspects as a process improvement initiative and not simply as a list of bugs needing to be fixed.
issues, causing wasted development time. The U.S. Government, General Services Administration states, “Automated scanning tools cannot apply human subjectivity, and therefore either produce excessive false positives or—when configured to eliminate false positives—test for only a small portion of the requirement.”

5. Update Procurement Processes: Much of what gets flagged during an audit is often from third-party content, which is content that the healthcare organization does not have direct control over. It is important to make accessibility part of your procurement of software and digital services and to put pressure on your existing vendors to become compliant. Review contracts with all of your digital vendors and require a live-user audit and letter of conformance to WCAG 2.0 AA from each.

6. Stay Accessible: People and processes change over time and it is important to be diligent to protect your current investment in digital accessibility and continue to be compliant in the future. Your site and apps are not standing still, and each change may contain accessibility issues. While this doesn’t need to be overly costly, it does mean regularly training your staff and monitoring your properties, and that proper quality assurance process are in place to review for issues during releases.

Accessible360 partners with organizations to help balance short-term compliance needs with a long-term roadmap to achieve success.

**Typical steps include:**

1. Get Organized: Appoint a digital accessibility coordinator and provide a digital accessibility statement on your public sites and apps. Also consider talking with legal counsel about adopting accessibility policies and procedures, which can reduce risk of litigation as well as potentially reduce damages.

2. Generate a Plan: With help from internal marketing, digital agency partners, compliance officers, attorneys and an expert accessibility consultant such as A360, determine a scope of work. In a large organization this work is often done in phases. External-facing websites meant for the general public are often the first to be tackled, with other high-visibility sites and apps done soon after.

3. Be Proactive: For sites and apps currently in design-stage, have your comps reviewed by accessibility experts to try and catch issues even before they are coded.

4. Audit Existing Properties: Perform a thorough audit on existing digital properties. This audit should be done by an experienced, third-party team. While there are automated scanning tools available, these tools only catch a small percentage of accessibility issues while also flagging false-positive
Healthcare organizations need to implement proactive measures to make their websites, apps and other digital communications accessible to blind and other disabled users, while also holding their digital vendors accountable. Doing so not only reduces your legal risk but also provides a better experience to all of your patients and other stakeholders. By beginning to research this topic you are taking an important first step. Contact Accessible360 now to see how we can help you navigate your path to digital accessibility.
FURTHER READING

• Healthcare Sector is Newest Target for Website Accessibility Lawsuits, Steven E. Helland, Fredrikson & Byron P.A: https://www.fredlaw.com/news_media/2017/01/18/1427/healthcare_sector_is_newest_target_for_website_accessibility_lawsuits/


• GSA Government-wide IT Accessibility Program: https://www.section508.gov/
ABOUT ACCESSIBLE360

Accessible360 helps organizations large and small navigate their path to digital accessibility, giving more people access to the products and services they offer. The A360 Roadmap is a proven strategy for efficiently getting your business compliant and keeping it that way for the long run. We combine live, disabled-user testing, innovative technology, training, and senior-level support and monitoring to give you a clear plan to build digital accessibility into your processes.

Learn more at accessible360.com.