Digital Accessibility and Living with A Disability

**League of Minnesota Cities
Statewide Accessibility Training 2025**

designed and delivered by
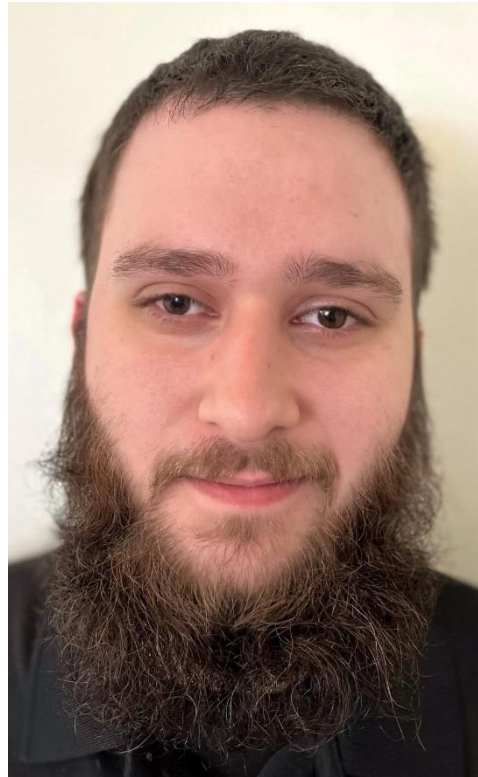Digital Accessibility by WeCo

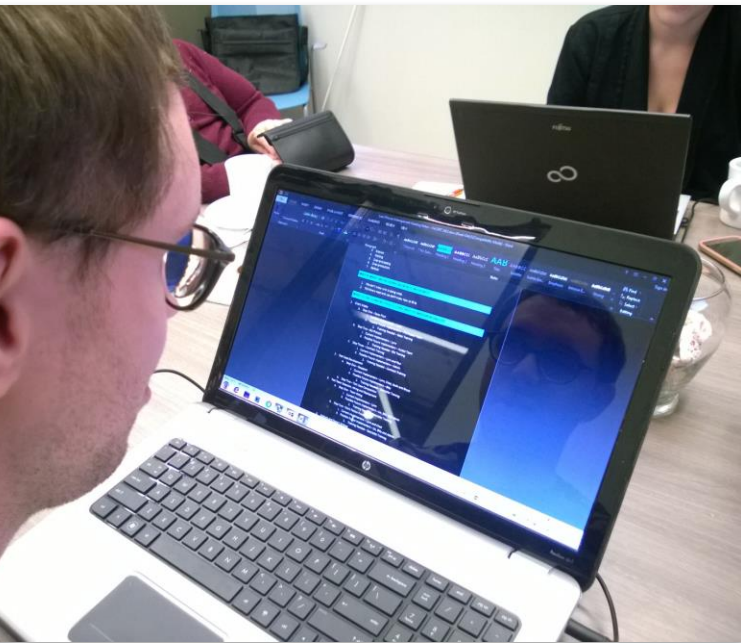# Your Instructors

Lynn Wehrman
President/CEO

- Neurodiverse
- Early Accessibility Expert for State of Minnesota

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Lead Accessibility Specialist

- Native Screen Reader User
- Philosophy and Computer Science Geek

Who is teaching this workshop?

- Experts with disabilities for a digitally inclusive world.
- Guide accessibility with our lived experience
- International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP)
  - WAS and CPACC Certified Specialists
  - Test Consultants representing all disability types.

Because simulations can't replace real human experience!

Workshop Overview

1. What does "digital accessibility" mean?

2. Accessibility and the law

3. Navigating digitally with a disability

4. Accessibility pitfall and best practices
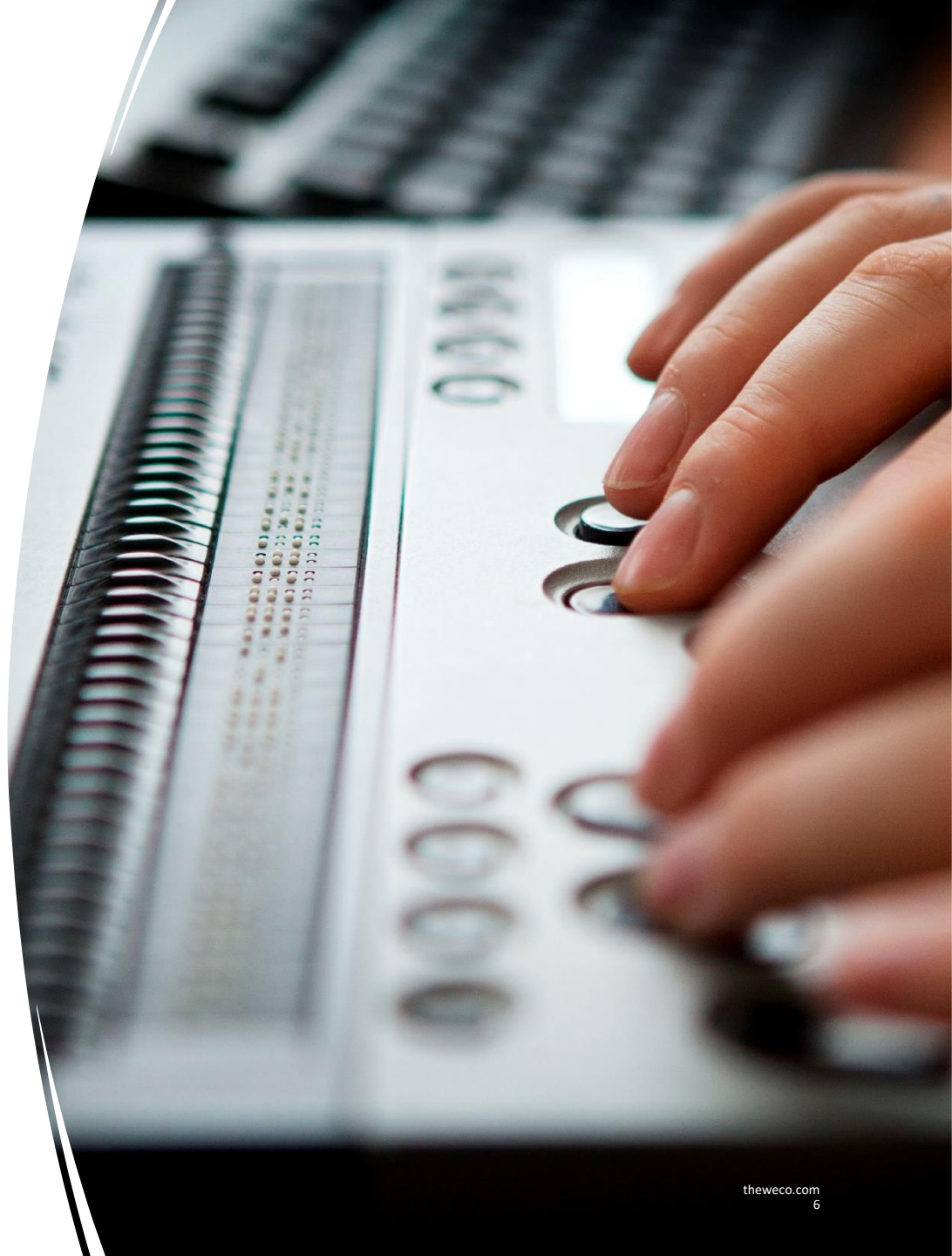
5. Getting started

6. Questions & Discussion

An opportunity to reach more people

WHAT IS DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY?

What does "digital accessibility" mean?

Everyone can access information found on websites, in digital documents, mobile applications and software programs, **regardless of disability.**
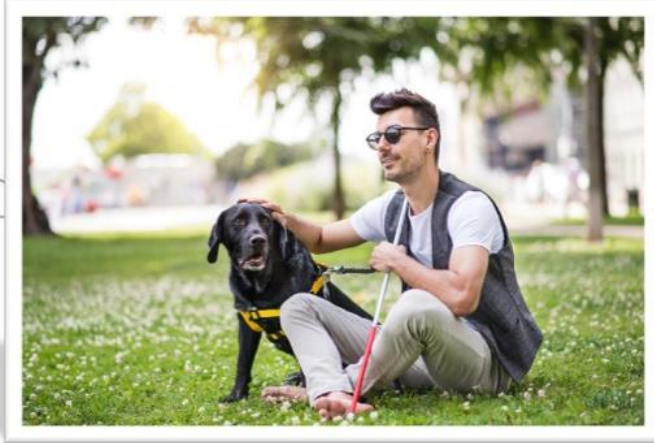
How does digital *inaccessibility* affect those of us who live with disabilities?

What we need and want to know is:
- Difficult for us to find
- Invisible to us
- Hard for us to understand

In 2023,
668,000 or 12%
of Minnesotans reported
living with a disability

Where do we live?
50 % Greater Minnesota
50% Twin Cities Metro

Disability is increasing because:
*Minnesotans are aging
(65 + make up 62% of demo)

*Younger adults (18+) are
experiencing a rapid rise in
chronic illnesses.

*Information from Minnesota Compass
and Wilder Research*

How big of an issue is digital accessibility in Minnesota?

Why are we doing this?

ACCESSIBILITY AND THE LAW

Digital Accessibility is a Government Legal Requirement Shaped by a Globally Accepted Guideline

Guideline:
Web Content Accessibility Guideline (WCAG)

Laws:

Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Section 508

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title Two

WCAG:
Guidelines that are transforming digital access around the globe

- World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)
  - Levels 1, 2 and 2.1 and 2.2 (A,AA, AAA)
    - 3.0 exploration
  - Globally accepted
  - Applied to laws around the world

ADA Web Rules: Released in April 2024

- Web content, mobile applications and social media must be accessible to persons with disabilities.

- Part of a long-awaited clarification for this civil rights law.

ADA Web Rule Overview

1. Technical Standard: WCAG 2.1 AA

2. State and local governments must comply with website and mobile application requirements.

3. The website and mobile app content 3rd party vendors develop for you **is included** in requirement.

4. Compliance dates vary on the size of your entity.

Compliance Dates

State and local government size	Compliance date
0 to 49,999 persons	April 26, 2027
Special district governments	April 26, 2027
50,000 or more persons	April 24, 2026

Is the web rule slated for change?

Will present political currents change the direction of the ADA?

Not likely due to:

- Legal precedence
- Recent state ruling
- Rule making process

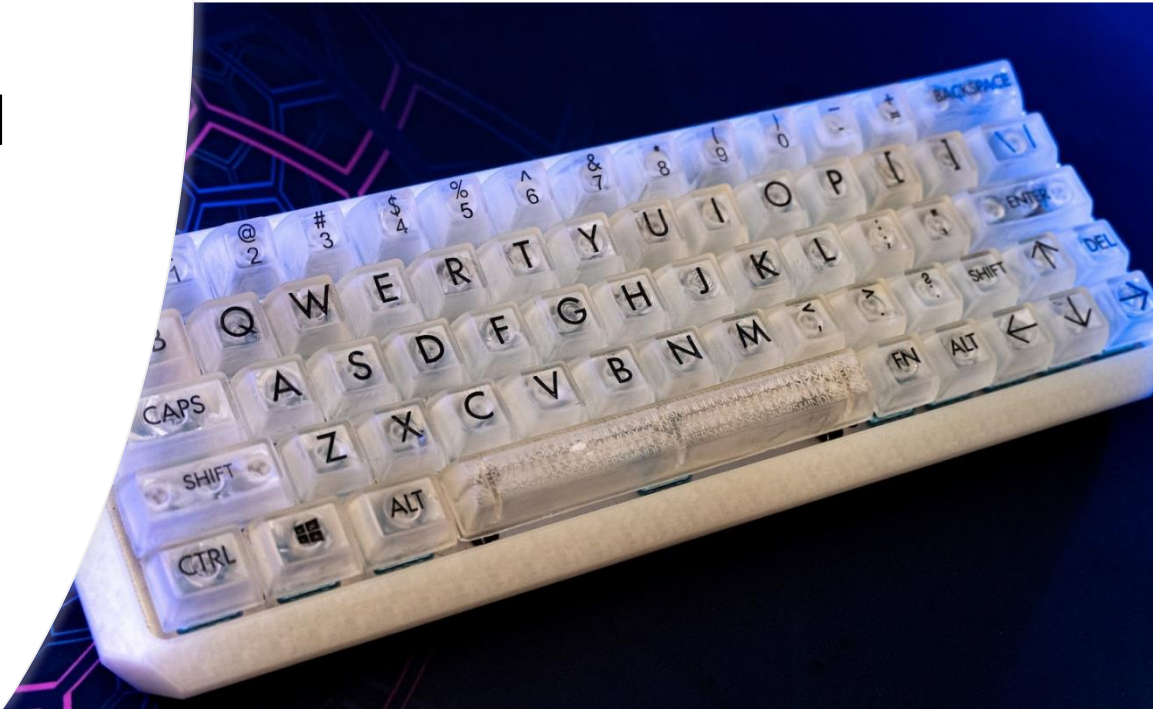What is it like to use a website when you live with a disability?
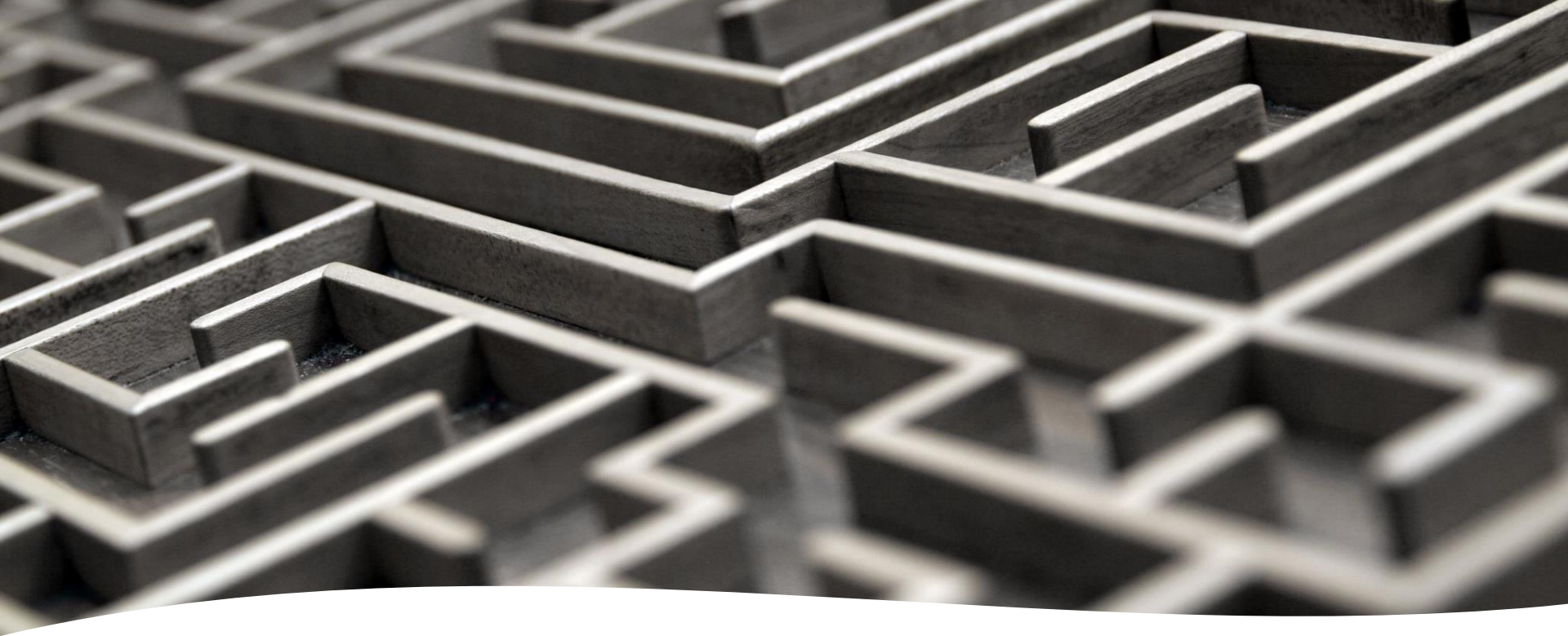
NAVIGATING DIGITALLY WITH A DISABILITY
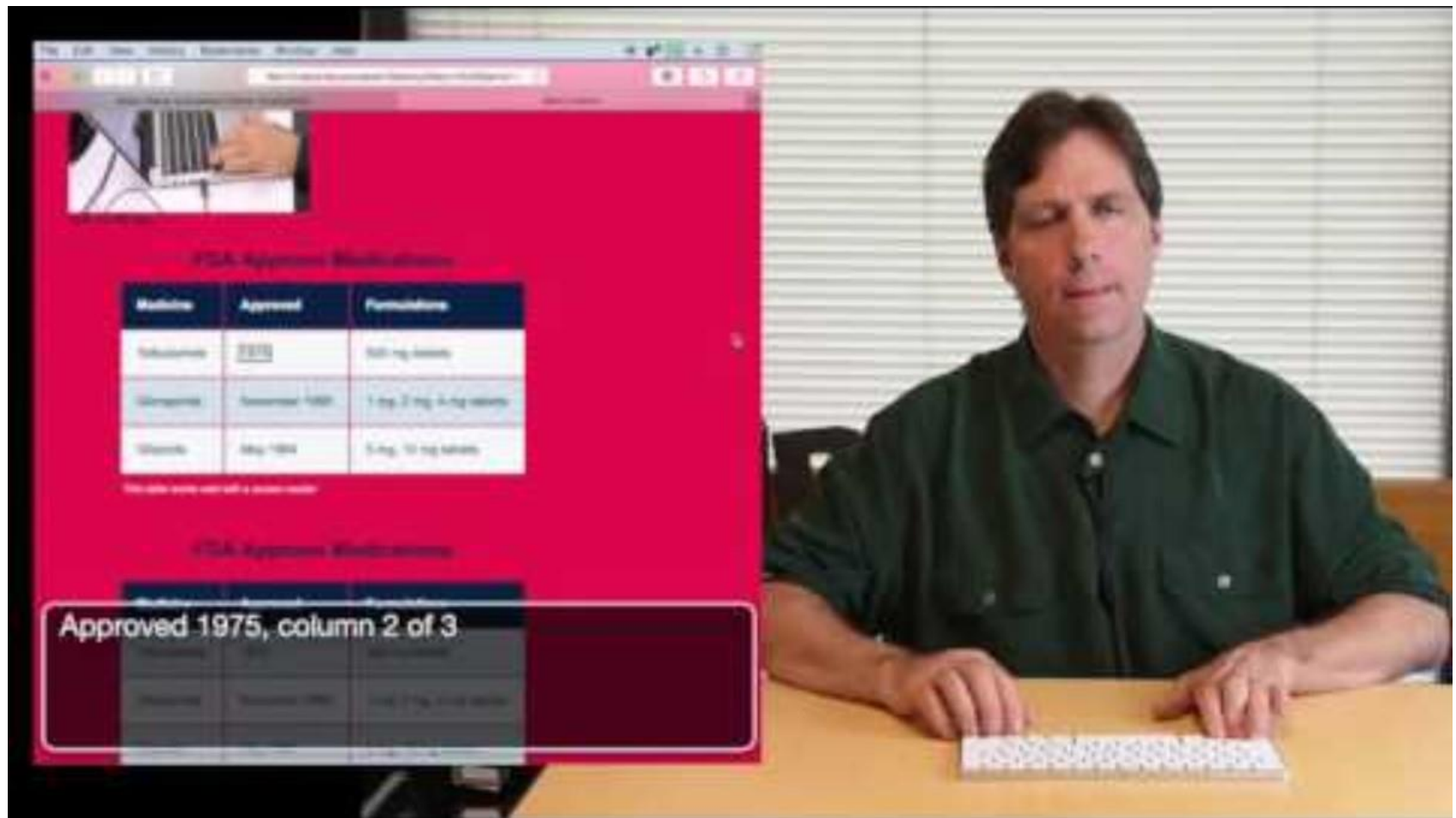
Websites are much more
than just visual.
They can be heard and touched.

Devices People Use for Nonvisual Access

- Braille Laptop
- Enlarged or Embossed Keyboard
- Screen Magnifier Software
- Screen Reader Software

Frequent Issues

- Unmarked components
- No navigational choices
- Unmarked images
- One option for receiving information
- Automatic movement and refresh
- Sound

Navigating a websites is possible with limited, or no, use of your hands.

Devices People Use with Limited Fine Motor Skills

- Speech Recognition Software

- Eye Tracking Software

- Specialized mouses & pointers

- Altered keyboards
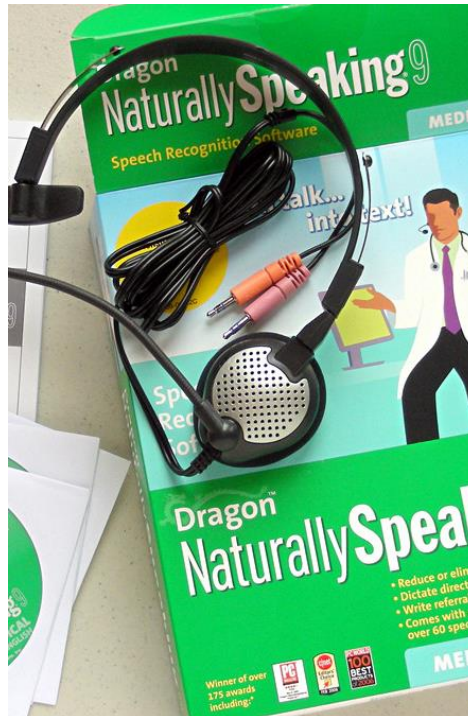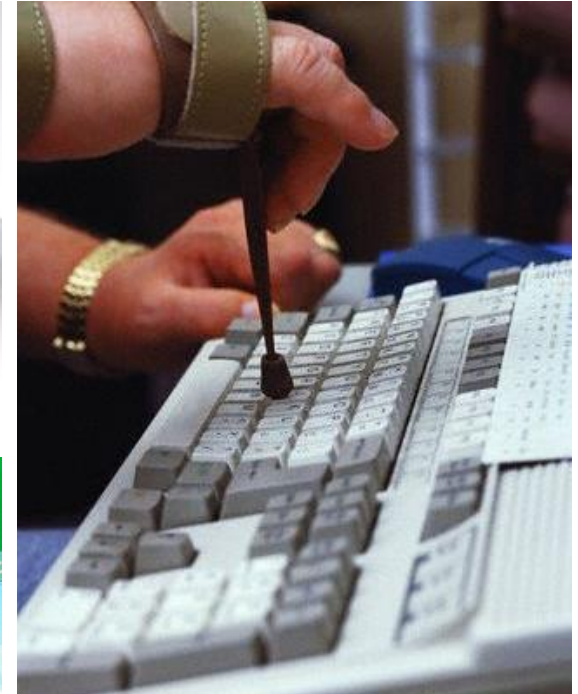
Frequent Issues

- Mouse to keyboard travel

- Small touch targets

- Timed web sites/forms
  - Job applications
  - Financial forms

- Mouse-dependent sites
  - Numerous pages, links and attachments
  - Scrolling for content

Good Design:
When people use AT

Screen Reader Considerations

1. Add "Skip To": Let users get to content immediately if they wish.

2. Use Navigation Menus: mark headings in descending order, bulleted & numbered lists, etc.
Ex: Screen readers uses them as navigation points.

3. Properly label links so users know where they're going
Ex: social media icons

4. Apply meaningful alternative text, don't rely on auto generated

5. Label controls Ex: picture carousels

6. Avoid nested tables. Might be part of your organization's template.

Limited Motor Skill Considerations

1. Make your website "keyboard only" accessible: allow easy tabbing and arrowing. Not all of us use mouses!

2. Use CSS: mark headings in descending order, bulleted & numbered lists, etc.
Ex: Speech recognition software uses them as navigation points.

3. Leave open space on link lists
Ex: People with hand tremor can have difficulty selecting them.

4. Limit scrolling (it's tiring!): present information in no more than 2 screen lengths.

5. Make controls and other features large enough to select.
Ex: Time extension buttons on forms.

We receive information from videos, even if we can't see or hear them.

A note about ASL

American Sign Language

- Not direct translation of spoken English

- Sentence structure differs

- Punctuation achieved via facial expression

When people take in information differently, some websites can be confusing.

What is neurodiversity, or to have a cognitive disability?

- Dyslexia
- Depression
- Attention Deficit Disorder
- Autism
- Epilepsy
- Brain Injuries
- Intellectual

Good Design:
When people don't use AT

Cognitive Considerations

1. <u>Use simple, straight forward text</u> and avoid jargon and anacronyms

2. <u>Limit page clutter</u>: Don't overwhelm--white space is a good thing! Use an archive.

3. <u>Allow user media control</u>: Ex: Leave carousel controls in the "off" position.

4. <u>Make it easy to find information in more than one way</u>. Ex: Search boxes, topic buttons

Hearing Considerations

1. <u>Provide visual success indicators and warnings</u>: Ex: Form submission error/success messages

2. <u>Provide captioning and transcripts for video</u>. Think, "what if I couldn't see and/or hear this video?"

3. <u>Educate your website assistance people on ASL and spoken language structure differences</u>. Avoid potential confusion and misunderstandings.

Recap and application

3 ACCESSIBILITY PITFALLS AND BEST PRACTICES

Accessibility Pitfall #1: Websites are for used visually only

- Approaching websites and software as purely "visual" mediums

- No navigation points

- No image identification

Tips to Avoid this Pitfall

- Use navigation menus: Headings, bullted lists
- Add alt text tags to images

Accessibility Pitfall #2:
It's all about AT users

The needs of users who don't use AT are not considered in design and content management choices.

Tips to Avoid this Pitfall

- Challenge ideas that accessibility is only about AT users

- Educate your team about the digital needs of all users

Accessibility Pitfall #3:
A widget/overlay can make our website accessible

We don't need to learn about accessibility, we can just buy a widget and pay a monthly fee.

Cautionary Tale:
The Fallacy of Quick Fix Accessibility

Overlays, Widgets and Dashboards

- "Band-aid" that doesn't address accessibility-30-50% of WCAG at best

- Forces users to learn a new tool and not use their own daily software

- Pushes user into "separate" experience of your website.

- Creates legal issues and poor image

Another website telling me to use their tool bar INSTEAD of my screen reader!

On January 3, 2025, the FTC issued a press release with the headline:

" FTC Order Requires Online Marketer to Pay $1 Million for Deceptive Claims that its AI Product Could Make Websites Compliant with Accessibility Guidelines "

Lawsuits in 2025

- January 2025: accessiBee sued by the Federal Trade Commission for misrepresentation

- February 2025: Userway faces class action lawsuit for misrepresentation

What if all users had to learn a new tool to enter your website? Why do we expect this of people who live with disabilities? Is this discrimination?
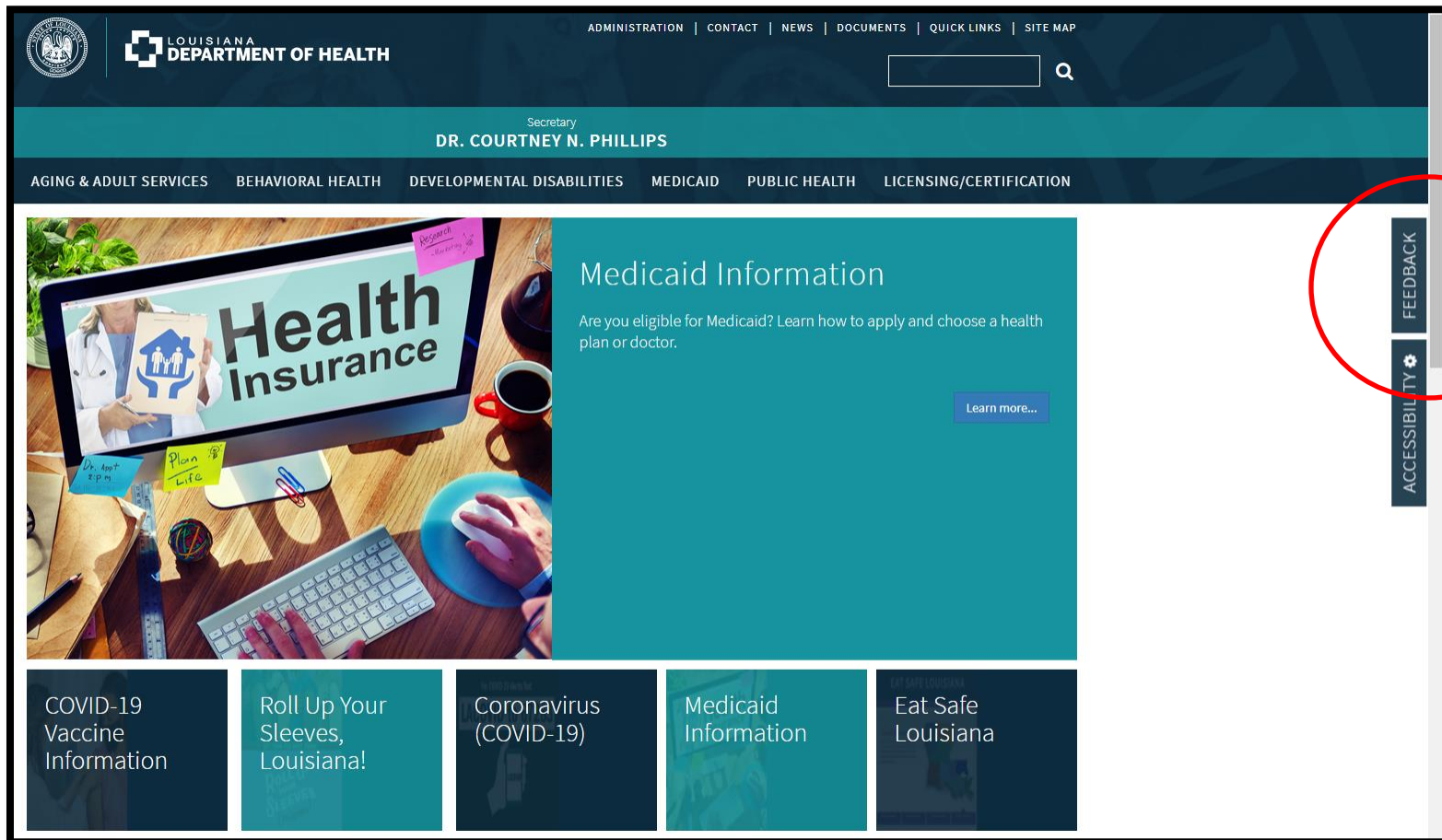
Website Examples

Is this site accessible?

Is this site accessible?

Is this site accessible?

Is this website accessible?

Is this website accessible?

Making Accessibility a Part of the Daily

GETTING STARTED

"Accessibility isn't a feature.
It's a process."
Jon Metz

Getting Started: overview

Manual Audit — Conducted by experienced pros. Creates a basis for goal and process.

Goal — Set a goal and communicate it to your agency and the public.

Process — Create a process with role-based task assignments.

Train — Train your teams to understand, develop and maintain accessibility.

Digital accessibility can't be "Googled" in an afternoon and implemented.

Training builds sustainability.

Leverage your accessibility efforts to train and create robust processes.

- Use an expert to coach your team in applying the fixes from your Manual Audit.

- Make digital accessibility training an ongoing activity.

- Integrate accessibility planning and reviews into web development and maintenance steps.

3rd Party Content and Accessibility Responsibilities

Examples of Owner Responsibility

1. **Content created for your agency**: mobile apps

2. **Systems you put on your website:** payment and reservation systems.

3. **Systems that allow others to post your website:** message boards

How to Manage It

- Educate your team in digital accessibility.

- Set vendor standards for accessibility.

- Vote with your wallet.

Already make the purchase or start the relationship?
Agency provides training, vendor provides the time, you both win.

Questions and Discussion

Resources

- [Fact Sheet: New Rule on the Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Apps Provided by State and Local Governments | ADA.gov](#)

- [*"Small Entity Compliance Guide"*](#)

- ADA Info Line: 800-514-0301 (voice)
  1-833-610-1264 (TTY)

- [ADA National Network | Information, Guidance and Training on the Americans with Disabilities Act](#)

Thank you for joining us!

Instructors are available to chat and answer questions following.