

## What is the Standard?

The Standard is a set of rules about the way we approach digital accessibility at FACS. When designing, developing and delivering digital content at FACS, we:

1. [Put people first](#)
2. [Design for everyone](#)
3. [Follow the Australian Government's Digital Service Standard](#)
4. [Adhere to WCAG](#)
5. [Know the content types](#)
6. [Write in plain English](#)
7. [Make sure PDFs are accessible](#)
8. [Provide alternative formats](#)
9. [Provide language translation support](#)
10. [Allow for assistive methods](#)
11. [Test, validate and verify](#)
12. [Report, fix and review](#)

## About the Standard

[Why do we have the Standard?](#)

[Who should use the Standard?](#)

[What's next?](#)

[Useful links](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

# 1. Put people first

Usability is all about putting the needs of people first.

So often in government and large organisations, we put the organisational need first and forget about what people need to successfully engage with us.

When designing, developing and delivering digital services, we follow the [design principles in the Australian Government's Digital Service Standard](#). We also use the [standards for usability from the United States Government](#).

Both of these resources have excellent tips for building usability into your design and development practice.

Usability testing helps us establish how well a digital service works by watching how users actually use it. At FACS, [we undertake usability testing at key points](#) during the design and development process to identify problems and fix them before a service is released.

## How do you know if you're putting people first? Key questions to ask

- ☐ Can people easily complete key tasks?
- ☐ How quickly can people complete those tasks?
- ☐ Can people complete the task on their first try?
- ☐ What distractions or barriers do people face? Can you remove those?
- ☐ After using the service once, can a person remember enough to use it effectively the next time?
- ☐ How much do people like using your service?

Don't forget to use a responsive design that adapts to a range of devices and screen sizes, and to test on the full range of browsers and platforms that your audience may be using.

## 2. Design for everyone

At FACS, we have diverse audience groups.

We provide information in digital formats to a wide range of people in the community, including:

- families and carers
- young people
- older people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- people with disability
- people who are homeless
- people who are at risk or in crisis
- people with mental illness
- people with low levels of literacy
- people with diverse learning needs
- people who speak languages other than English.

We also provide information in digital formats to a wide range of people working in our areas of expertise, including:

- internal staff
- employees in other government departments
- professionals working across a range of sectors, including housing, disability, health and human services.

There may be substantial crossovers within all of these groups and we must take everyone's needs into consideration.

This means that, when we design content that is going to be published in a digital format, we must make sure we're designing for everyone. While we know that the [technical rules around accessibility must be applied](#), we want to make sure that our designs and information go further than this.

For example, we want our content to meet the needs of people with cognitive disability as well as those with sensory or physical disability. And we want to include people with low levels of literacy or diverse learning needs.

## How can we design for everyone?

We can design for everyone by taking the following design ideas into consideration when creating digital content. This work is in addition to following the criteria that outline how we always [put people first](#), [adhere to WCAG](#) and [write in plain English](#).

Here's what you can do:

- ☐ Keep interactions brief and simple.
- ☐ Keep the visual design uncluttered.
- ☐ Organise your content structure well.
- ☐ Use a responsive design that adapts to a range of devices and screen sizes.
- ☐ Break long content up over several pages and include reminders of where people are up to – for example, Step 2 of 4.
- ☐ Show the current task, including its status and progress.
- ☐ Provide simple, clear error messages.
- ☐ Provide warnings – for example when someone is about to delete a file or exit without saving.
- ☐ Only change features on a page if users request to do so.
- ☐ Use visual structure and white space well.
- ☐ Write simply and clearly. [Use plain English or, where relevant, Easy Read](#).
- ☐ Provide a glossary for complex words.
- ☐ Warn users of extreme changes in content – such as opening up a PDF.

- ☐ Make all interactions as predictable as possible.
- ☐ Offer more than one way to find a page.
- ☐ Try to help the user to focus. Don't distract people with unnecessary graphics, especially animated graphics.
- ☐ Present information in a common sense way to reduce the cognitive energy people need to use to complete tasks on your site. Do the thinking for people at the design stage so they don't have to work hard when they use your site.
- ☐ Use visual cues to highlight important points or sections of the content.
- ☐ If possible, eliminate advertisements and sponsored links.
- ☐ Make sure the location of the cursor is obvious.
- ☐ Make important content noticeable and easy to scan. Avoid background noises or images that distract. Instead, use these tools to focus the user's attention.
- ☐ Avoid long lists of options for someone to choose from. Keep the number of choices short and succinct.
- ☐ Be flexible in how data is viewed, entered and saved. For example, allow spaces in phone or credit card numbers that people would usually use.
- ☐ Use media such as illustrations, icons, photos, video and audio to connect with people with cognitive disability or learning needs.
- ☐ Use captions or sign language for videos – [we explain more about this here](#).
- ☐ Allow users to stop or pause time-sensitive features, such as videos or rotating banners.

- ❑ Help users by doing the maths for them. Where computations are required, such as in eCommerce sites that add the price of the items purchased, tax, shipping and handling, and other charges, perform these computations automatically, so the user does not have to.
- ❑ Provide translated materials where relevant. Find out more about [language translation support](#) here.

Many of these tips have been collated from the following sources:

- [WebAIM's advice on designing for cognitive disabilities](#)
- [AccessIQ's article outlining the practical things that can be done to design for people with cognitive disabilities](#)

### 3. Follow the Australian Government's Digital Service Standard

Digital Service Standards are a list of criteria that governments must meet when providing digital services. This covers all online products, including websites, intranets, user interfaces such as forms and online services, and mobile apps.

Digital Service Standards are based on putting people's needs first and in making digital services easy to use.

At FACS, rather than reinvent the wheel, we follow the [Australian Government's Digital Service Standard](#). This standard came into effect in 2016 and outlines broad usability and accessibility principles for websites and digital services developed at a national level.

This Digital Accessibility Standard takes the advice from the Digital Service Standard around accessibility and expands on it, addressing areas that are specific to FACS, including our approaches and our audiences.

We also recognise the [Digital by Default Service Standard used in the United Kingdom](#). The UK approach has set the best-practice standard for digital service delivery and the Australian Government has modelled their service standard on it.

## 4. Adhere to WCAG

The [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#) are used widely around the world as a benchmark for web accessibility.

At FACS, we adhere – at a minimum – to WCAG 2.0 Level AA.

Our goal is to take our digital accessibility beyond WCAG. In particular, we [carefully consider the needs of people with cognitive disability](#).

WCAG has four main principles:

- **Perceivable** – Information and user interface components must be presentable to users in ways they can perceive.
- **Operable** – User interface components and navigation must be operable.
- **Understandable** – Information and the operation of user interface must be understandable.
- **Robust** – Content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of user agents.

For each principle, there are a list of criteria that need to be met to make sure your online content is accessible. There are 38 techniques in total.

The '[How to meet WCAG](#)' quick reference guide is a helpful starting point.

Then, you need to test and audit the digital product. See the criteria explaining how we always [test, validate and verify](#).

You can also find out more about our criteria for [reporting, fixing and reviewing](#).



## 5. Know the content types

At FACS, there are a range of content types. Knowing these types allows us to apply usability and accessibility for all of our audiences. It also helps us understand when we should apply various accessibility techniques.

For example, every single PDF that we publish must be accessible. However, you don't always need to provide a plain English version of every document or web page – especially if you are publishing an academic text. However, plain English summaries are helpful.

Knowing your content types goes hand in hand with knowing your audience. Then you can work toward providing content that meets your user's needs.

### What are the content types?

*[Note to FACS colleagues: This section could be provided in a concertina style, so that people can open up/reveal the sections of the content they would like to read.]*

#### Apps

When designing and developing apps for mobile or desktop use, all accessibility requirements apply. [The W3C article on mobile accessibility is a good starting point.](#) Include all the criteria in the Standard when designing and developing content for apps, including [putting people first](#), [designing for everyone](#), [adhering to WCAG](#), [testing with users](#) and [writing in plain English](#).

#### Documents

Documents include everything from legislation to fact sheets.

All documents must be accessible when sharing them online – either on the FACS intranet or on our public-facing websites. Documents should also be made accessible when sharing them widely via email or other online distribution methods.

HTML is the most accessible format and should be used wherever possible. Word is the next most accessible.

[Alternative formats should be provided when publishing a document as a PDF](#), because of known issues on mobile devices.

No scanned PDFs are allowed on FACS websites [unless an alternative is provided](#).

All PDFs should be tagged and have accompanying short summaries. [Find out more about PDF accessibility here](#).

The best starting point for an accessible document is the template. If a template is accessible, the process of ensuring that the final document is accessible becomes easier. A range of FACS templates are available from Ministerial and Communication Services (MACS).

[There is also a helpful range of 'How to Guides' on producing accessible Word and PDF documents on the FACS Intranet \(for internal use\)](#).

Most documents should be written in plain English, and long documents should be broken down if possible. However, each business area will need to make an informed decision about writing academic, legal or research material in plain English. Evaluation of the needs of the audience will be critical in each instance. Plain English summaries toward the top of a web page are a great way to help a reader decide if they will access the full content of a longer document or article. Glossaries or word lists also help.

[Find out more about writing in plain English here](#).

Some fact sheets or other external communications might require translation into a range of languages, or an Easy Read version. Please see [providing alternative formats](#) for more information.

## **Forms**

Forms should be clear and easy to use. You must consider the way the form will be used and the language that you use to explain the steps in completing the form.

The accessibility of the form must be taken into consideration at a technical level and you should follow the WCAG techniques for creating accessible forms. [This article from Web AIM has some great advice on how to do this](#).

## **Graphics and data**

Graphics should be clear and easy to understand. Check that the correct colour contrast ratio has been used. And remember that alternative text must be provided.

When writing alternative text for online content, you need to keep your description brief – preferably under 100 characters. However, if you have a complex diagram or graph that has multiple concepts, you must describe these. If 100 characters is not enough to describe the content effectively, a text description of the content can be provided in a link. When writing alternative content in a program like Microsoft Word or Adobe InDesign, you can provide longer descriptions.

## **Presentations**

You can make your presentations accessible by following the guidance for colour contrast and the provision of alternative text on images, graphs and data. If you wish to publish your presentation online, a good way to do this is to provide an accessible PDF, as well as the PowerPoint file if possible.

## **Research**

Research reports and papers, evaluation studies and literature reviews may be long and unwieldy for non-specialised readers. When publishing this kind of material on our intranet or public-facing websites, it is important to provide a plain English summary describing what the content is about in a clear and succinct way. Readers can then decide if they would like to read the document. The document itself should be published in an accessible format, with an alternative to PDF provided.

## **Social media**

Unfortunately, the accessibility of third-party social media platforms is out of our hands. However, we can take steps to make sure that our use of social media considers the needs of our audience. For example, we can ensure that all of the videos we publish and share are captioned.

We can also make sure that all of the documents we share publically are accessible – that means that if someone shares a file, or a link to a file, we know that the widest range of people will be able to use it.

When people follow links to our websites, we can make sure that the web pages are accessible and that alternative formats are available.

## **Web pages**

Web page content should be presented in clear, easy to understand text that is broken up into digestible chunks with good, descriptive headings. Providing plain English summaries about complex information is a helpful way to connect with your website visitor and let them decide if they'd like to read more.

## **Videos**

Videos are a great way to communicate but they are not accessible to everyone if alternatives – such as captions – are not provided. At FACS, we provide captioning as a minimum, and audio description and Auslan translations in some circumstances. [Find out more about the criteria for providing alternative formats here.](#)

## 6. Write in plain English

Plain English is direct, everyday language.

According to the Plain English Campaign in the UK, plain English is:

"A message, written with the reader in mind and with the right tone of voice, that is clear and concise."

Plain English is for everyone. Plain English isn't 'dumbed-down'. It can be used for any kind of business writing and it can be aimed at any audience.

We all appreciate plain English, particularly when it helps us find and understand information quickly and easily.

When you write content for FACS, use plain English.

When you write content for any of our digital products, use plain English.

Sometimes, there will be exceptions – perhaps you need to publish a research report or a technical or academic paper, and it won't be possible to write the whole thing in a plain, simple way. In this case, think about some helpful tools you can insert into your content, such as:

- A plain English summary, describing the purpose and content of the material.
- A plain English glossary or word list, explaining the key words.

There is a movement toward the use of plain English across the whole of the NSW Government, including within FACS. If you need training in this way of writing, speak to your colleagues or manager.

If you'd like some tips to help you get started right away, here are some resources that you may find useful:

- [the Australian Government Digital Transformation Office's advice on writing in plain English](#)
- [the UK Digital Service Standard's information about how people read](#)
- [the UK Digital Service Standard for writing plainly.](#)

Sometimes, we publish content in an Easy Read format. This is a method of presenting information in a simplified way, using pictures to support text. It is helpful when communicating with people with cognitive or intellectual disability, adults with low levels of literacy, older people and in Aboriginal audiences. When creating content specifically for these audiences, please consider the use of an Easy Read version of your material.

## 7. Make sure PDFs are accessible

At FACS, every PDF that we publish online or send electronically should be accessible. This means that a PDF will have, at minimum:

- ☐ the correct heading structure
- ☐ text alternatives for images
- ☐ a document title
- ☐ the language identified
- ☐ the correct colour contrast levels in use
- ☐ hyperlinks that are displayed with meaningful text – apply the link to the text, avoid repetitive text such as ‘Read more’ and avoid long web links/URLs
- ☐ a table of contents, linking to the correct sections of the document
- ☐ bullet points for the presentation of information in lists
- ☐ no nested tables and – where possible – no merged, split or blank table cells
- ☐ tables with header rows that have been specified
- ☐ full accessibility checks performed in Adobe Acrobat
- ☐ a manual reading order check to ensure that the content flows correctly when read out by a screen reader.

However, even if we perform the checks above, we don’t rely on PDF alone. This is largely because:

- Not all versions of all screen readers read out PDFs consistently.
- PDF does not currently have accessibility support on mobile devices.

[Find out more about the criteria for providing alternatives to PDF here.](#)

## 8. Provide alternative formats

It's important to remember that not everyone uses digital content in the same way. We all have preferences for the way we browse online, save our files, write our emails or view social media. Allowing flexibility and control to rest with the user is at the heart of providing alternative formats.

Remember that not everyone is using the latest version of the software that you might be using in your work, or they may not own proprietary software like Microsoft Office.

Some people use assistive technology, such as screen readers, mobile apps and magnifying software to help them access digital content. There are vast differences in the way these kinds of tools operate and we can't be sure that every product we produce will be used the same way with each tool. For this reason, alternative formats are essential.

Similarly, some people with sensory disability require alternative formats that meet their needs. For example, some people require Braille versions of text, audio files that read content aloud, or text descriptions of audio content.

And some people with a range of disabilities, learning needs and cognitive conditions such as dyslexia require content in a simple, clear format like [plain English or Easy Read](#). Alternative fonts and large text sizes can be incredibly helpful in some situations.

FACS supports the use of text-to-speech software such as ReadSpeaker or BrowseAloud.

Alternative types of content should be provided wherever possible or, as a last resort, upon request.

[Read more about choosing appropriate formats from the UK's Digital Service Standard](#).



## Videos

Videos that are published on our intranet and public-facing websites must be captioned, and where appropriate audio descriptions and Auslan should be used. When preparing your script it will need to be written in Plain English.

Captions are the text version of speech and other audible content that appears on videos, and are used to communicate with people who are Deaf or hearing impaired. People also view content with captions in noisy environments and when teaching or training others who are learning English.

Audio description is an audible narration of visual representations such as television programs, films and live performances. During gaps of dialogue it describes visual elements such as scenes, settings, actions and costumes to the viewer. Audio description is useful to people who are blind or who have low vision and people who have print, learning and/or physical disabilities.

Auslan is the Australian sign language and it is the primary or preferred language for many people in the Australian Deaf community. When producing videos for emergency communication, such as bushfires or floods, an Auslan interpreter must be present on screen for the entire duration of the video. For other videos, where possible, we recommend including an Auslan interpreter.

Auslan interpreters can be booked through the following organisations:

- [Deaf Society of NSW](#)
- [National Auslan Interpreter Booking and Payment Service](#).

## PDF

If your document is up to four pages long, please don't publish it as a PDF. Please publish it as a web page instead. Documents over four pages can be published as an accessible PDF with an accompanying alternative format, such as HTML or an accessible Word document. An alternative format is required because:

- Not all versions of all screen readers read out PDFs consistently.
- PDF does not currently have accessibility support on mobile devices.

No scanned PDFs are allowed on FACS websites unless an alternative is provided.

The best starting point for an accessible document is the template. If a template is accessible, the process of ensuring that the final document is accessible becomes easier. A range of FACS templates are available from Ministerial and Communication Services (MACS).

Please see [making sure PDFs are accessible](#) for more information about the requirements for an accessible PDF.

[There is also a helpful range of 'How to Guides' on producing accessible Word documents and other files on the FACS Intranet \(for internal use\).](#)

## **Languages other than English**

Alternative formats can also include content in languages other than English. We explain the criteria for [providing language translation support here](#).

## 9. Provide language translation support

At FACS, we understand that we have a responsibility to provide content in languages other than English and that the concept of accessibility includes language translation support. We believe there are three key ways to provide language translation support, and that each has its risks or costs, and benefits.

Method	Risks/Costs	Benefits
Machine translation, such as Google translate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inaccuracy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Easy to implement</li><li>• Little or no cost</li><li>• Fast to apply</li></ul>
Translation of documents by a qualified translator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May be expensive when considering the amount of content that needs to be translated across our digital products</li><li>• Takes time to be done well</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High levels of accuracy when services are provided by accredited translators and a second translator is engaged to check the content before publication</li></ul>
Telephone support provided on specific web pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People may not wish to call, they may wish to have the information available to them on the web page</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ongoing cost to maintain and manage</li></ul>

If you are producing multi-language translations, remember that writing your content in plain English first saves time and money when translating. And don't forget to make sure that, if your multi-language translations are provided in PDFs, they need to be fully accessible. Ask your translation supplier to ensure that WCAG compliant PDFs are provided.

## 10. Allow for assistive methods

Using assistive methods follows on from putting users first and providing alternative formats. Assistive methods allow the user the opportunity to change the content and use it in a way that meets their needs. This might include offering the ability to increase or decrease the text size, to offer a printable version of a web page and the use of tools such as apps that read content aloud.

Allowing for assistive methods can also include thinking outside of the digital space, depending on a person's needs. Not everyone will be able to access content online, so you need to consider those people who may need to complete a transaction or interact with FACS, but can't do so via a computer or mobile phone. This might be because they don't have access to the technology, or because a disability or other barrier prevents them from going online.

According to the [UK's Digital Service Standard, assisted digital support can be delivered in many ways](#), including:

- online, with access to appropriate support
- over the telephone, with someone guiding the user through the service or inputting information into a system on their behalf
- in person, at a service centre
- via video conferencing (from a shopfront or from the persons' location)
- through an authorised representative of the person assisting or acting on their behalf.

[The Australian Government's Digital Service Standard also has some helpful advice on providing assisted digital support.](#)

# 11. Test, validate and verify

## Test thoroughly internally

All FACS digital products should be tested at regular intervals, both before they go live and afterwards, to make sure that:

- they work well with the relevant browsers, platforms and devices
- users can perform the relevant tasks and actions can be completed
- the relevant criteria in the Standard have been met.

Accessibility testing should be part of this process, including:

- testing with accessibility software
- testing with assistive technology
- testing with a broad range of users, including people with diverse abilities.

Please also follow the ongoing accessibility testing recommendations under [report, fix and review](#). We also refer to the testing criteria outlined in the [Australian Government's Digital Service Standard](#).

Testing teams should be independent of the delivery team if possible.

## Validate by testing with users

Understanding how people use our digital products is central to our success.

And testing with users is an essential part of making sure that our digital products meet the needs of the intended audience.

The UK Digital Service Standard has an excellent guide to setting up, running and reporting on user testing sessions. Again in the spirit of not reinventing the wheel, [please use this advice to conduct user testing session for FACS](#).

The FACS Digital Accessibility User Network is a group of people that meets regularly and acts as a pool of people that we can tap into for user testing sessions. Please [contact the Digital Team](#) to discuss the User Network and how they may be able to assist with your user testing session.

## Verify with a specialist audit

We follow best practice recommendations and ensure that our digital products are tested by an accessibility expert.

This doesn't always have to mean contracting an external provider. Several of the members of our in-house development team are accessibility experts, and their specialist audit can be incorporated into the design and development lifecycle.

[This guide from the Australian Government Digital Transformation office](#) has excellent advice on:

- stocktaking the service for purpose, structure, formatting and technology
- assessing your internal capability
- agreeing on the scope and the audit methodology
- preparing your report.

At FACS, we follow the W3C's [Website Accessibility Conformance Evaluation Methodology \(WCAG-EM\) 1.0](#). [Find out more about how we use this here](#).

## 12. Report, fix and review

Reporting, fixing and reviewing are ways of ensuring that best-practice web accessibility is achieved both when launching a new product and when maintaining existing products.

We don't launch new accessible products and then let inaccessible features creep in. Maintaining our high levels of accessibility is part of our core business.

At FACS, we follow the W3C's [Website Accessibility Conformance Evaluation Methodology \(WCAG-EM\) 1.0](#) to review our digital products. This methodology incorporates scoping, testing and reporting, and includes a 5-step process:

- define the scope
- explore the website
- select a sample
- audit the sample
- report the finding.

In order to ensure that we maintain high levels of digital accessibility, we:

- schedule ongoing testing regularly and consistently
- fix inaccessible content as quickly as possible
- plan for and conduct future reviews.

If you come across any accessibility issues while using our digital services, please let us know. [The best way to contact the Digital Team is via email.](#)

# About the Standard

## Why do we have the Standard?

We designed the FACS Digital Accessibility Standard to make sure that everyone is included when we provide information and services in digital formats.

Putting people first is central to the way we work.

And making sure that our products meet a wide range of people's needs is our top priority when designing, developing and delivering digital projects.

The Standard helps us to meet our obligations under the law, including:

- The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (C'wlth)
- The *United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disability*, which was ratified by Australia in 2008.

The Standard is also part of our commitment to inclusion in our *Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2015-2019*.

But we don't just do this because we have to. We do this work because:

- We love connecting with our community and learning from our real-world customers and their experiences.
- We believe that every person has the right to be independent when accessing information.
- We're becoming experts in accessibility and we're passionate about achieving best-practice standards in this realm.



## Who should use the Standard?

The Digital Accessibility Standard is for everyone who works at FACS.

No matter what your role, the Standard is designed to help you make fast decisions about how you can create and share content while making sure it's inclusive and accessible.

You might be creating a PDF to send to a group via email, or you might be responsible for hands-on web development. Everyone at FACS needs to understand how important digital accessibility is, and how to put it into practice.

Managers, content specialists, user experience specialists, web developers and designers all have important responsibilities in making sure that everything we publish is accessible, and in sharing their knowledge with others in their teams and across the organisation.

But this doesn't mean that non-technical people don't have a role to play. We want everyone to take up the responsibility of checking that accessibility techniques have been applied – no matter what area you're working in, or what level of input you may have in the production of content.

Taking an approach of shared responsibility will ultimately mean that more of our digital products will be accessible than ever before, and this benefits all of us.

The Digital Accessibility Standard also recognises the role of the Disability Employee Network and their contribution to our continuing improvement in digital accessibility across FACS.

## What's next?

The FACS Digital Accessibility Standard is not static. It will be reviewed annually and new technology or changes in best-practice techniques will be accommodated.

We'd appreciate your feedback about putting the Standard into practice. Please [contact us via email](#) or complete the feedback form via our [accessibility statement](#).

If you're keen to learn more about digital accessibility and the initiatives that are under way across FACS to streamline our products, [please contact us via email](#).

## Useful links

### Service Standards

[Australia's Digital Service Standard](#)

[Australia's Digital Service Standard Design Guides](#)

[The UK Digital Service Standard](#)

[The US Digital Services Playbook](#)

### Accessibility Resources

[FACS Intranet 'How to' Guides \(for internal users\)](#)

[AccessIQ – Accessibility advice and resources](#)

NSW Government Agency Guide for Effective Communication for People with a Sensory Disability ([PDF version](#), [Word version](#))

[WCAG Overview](#)

[WCAG Quick Reference Guide](#)

[WebAIM – Accessibility advice and resources](#)

[Website Accessibility Conformance Evaluation Methodology \(WCAG-EM\) 1.0](#)

### Plain English and Easy Read

[The Information Access Group](#)

[The Plain English Foundation](#)

## Acknowledgements

The FACS Digital Accessibility Standard was written by the FACS Digital Team with support from the [Information Access Group](#), an external accessibility service provider. Digital Accessibility Specialists Lyndall Thomas, Anthony Briggs and Michelle Huyhn contributed to the development of the Standard.

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