# Victorian Government accessible communication policy

## Purpose

This is the Victorian Government accessible communication policy. In this document it will be referred to as 'the policy'.

The policy sets out the rules for communicating in a clear and direct way that is easy to understand. This is so that all Victorians – no matter their ability – have equal access to Victorian Government information.

## Scope

The policy applies to all Victorian Public Service and Special bodies as defined by the *Public Administration Act 2004* (Vic). This includes decision makers, workforce participants, employees, contractors, consultants, IT vendors, volunteers and any individuals or groups undertaking activity for or on behalf of the body.

In the policy, we call all workplace participants ‘staff’.

This policy is relevant to staff working in all disciplines. It is not a policy just for communications staff although they are a good place to go to if you have questions on the policy.

This policy applies to all internal and external communication and information sharing activities including:

* public-facing websites, subsites, intranets and extranets
* social media
* multimedia (video, audio, still images)
* digital content creation
* advertising (radio, TV, print, online, outdoor etc.)
* newsletters and EDMs (electronic direct mail)
* media releases if they are published online
* documents and presentations (PDFs, Word, PowerPoint, Excel)
* online forms and surveys
* closed client systems (learning management system, payment gateways)
* public-facing native apps.

## Relevant legislation

### Commonwealth legislation

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* requires us to ensure people with disability have the same access to information and services as others in the community. Under the Act, you can’t discriminate against a person with disability by excluding access to information and services.

### Victorian legislation

The *Disability Act 2006* (Vic) states under the objectives and principles that people with disability have the same right as other members of the community to access information and communicate in ways that are appropriate to their communication and cultural needs.

The *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) makes it against the law to discriminate against someone because of specific personal characteristics.

The *Public Administration Act 2004* (Vic) sets the standards for public sector communication and government advertising on television.

The *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) states in section 18.2.b “Every eligible person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination to have access, on general terms of equality, to the Victorian public service and public office.”

### Other guiding legislation and international conventions

Australian Human Rights Commission: World Wide Web Access, Disability Discrimination Act Advisory Notes, [2.2 states: ‘equal access is required by law](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/world-wide-web-access-disability-discrimination-act-advisory-notes-ver-41-2014#required)’.

The Commonwealth Government, through the 2010 [Web Accessibility National Transition Strategy,](https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20170421160001/http%3A/www.finance.gov.au/archive/publications/wcag-2-implementation/) implemented a policy of web accessibility for federal, state and local governments.

The Commonwealth Government also approved the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html). [Article 9](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-9-accessibility.html) and [Article 21](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-21-freedom-of-expression-and-opinion-and-access-to-information.html) state: ‘access to information, communications and services (including the internet) is a human right’.

## Objectives

The Victorian Government commits to open and inclusive communication principles. This means having information and services available to every individual no matter their ability, culture, or environment.

We understand that everyone may have different ways of communicating. We must consider the diverse range of needs of our users, including auditory, cognitive and neurological, physical, speech and visual considerations.

We aim to meet the communication needs of audiences. This means all people can easily access, understand and engage with our content.

## Accessible communication principles and approach

All staff of Victorian Public Service bodies and Special bodies are responsible for making their work accessible.

The policy is based on the following principles:

* Inclusivity: Ensure communications meet the needs of all audiences.
* Clarity: Use plain language and clear, concise messaging.
* Flexibility: Provide content in multiple formats to suit diverse needs, for example Easy Read, audio, video, braille.

We will always make sure we stay up to date on the latest in accessible communication practice. We will do this by reviewing standards and participating in education and training. Appendix 2 lists training and resources available.

## Standards for accessible content

The standards that all Victorian Government staff must follow or adhere to are:

* [Whole of Victorian Government (WoVG) style guide](https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-government-style-guide)
* International Plain Language Standard – access through [Victorian Government Library Service](https://i2.saiglobal.com/signon/signon/ssologin/dtf.vic.gov.au?link=https://i2.saiglobal.com/management/display/anchor/1541483/-/d21b62b86fabf1311f76936139b485c6) (VGLS login is required but is free to sign-up)
* Current version of the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)](https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/)
* [Brand Victoria guidelines](https://www.vic.gov.au/brand-victoria-guidelines-logos).

### Style guide

The Victorian Government has a style guide to make sure all departments write and create content in the same way. The [Victorian Government style guide](https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-government-style-guide) sets out the way we speak with our audience including:

* grammar
* punctuation
* formatting
* tone of voice
* use of language.

The Victorian Government style guide mostly follows the [Australian Government Style Manual](https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/). It also provides guidance on common style queries unique to the Victoria Government.

All activities listed under the ‘scope’ section must be created according to the style guide.

Sticking to the style guide means our content will be consistent. This means people will know what to expect from us.

### Plain language standard

Plain language is a system of writing that is clear, direct and easy to understand. It has no ambiguity or unnecessarily difficult words. Writing in this way makes it easier for everyone to understand. This is especially important for:

* people with disability
* people with low reading ability
* people with low English language skills.

The International Organization for Standardization published the international plain language standard (ISO 24495-1:2023) in June 2023.

All Victorian Public Service and Special bodies will adopt the international plain language standard. This means all content must meet the plain language rules set out in the standard.

The standard only applies to printed or digital information in text form. However, creators of other types of communication (podcasts and videos) will find the standard useful.

#### Readability

All information must be below a readability level of Year 8, as far as practically possible.

Some content may be technical and therefore hard to achieve a readability level of Year 8. In this instance, you can remove technical terms and then check the readability level.

There are tools available that measure readability. Free tools available include:

* [Hemingway app](https://hemingwayapp.com/)
* Microsoft Word - inbuilt readability feature found in the [spelling and grammar check](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/get-your-document-s-readability-and-level-statistics-85b4969e-e80a-4777-8dd3-f7fc3c8b3fd2).

#### Plain language and Easy Read

Plain language is different from Easy Read. Easy Read uses further simplified language and layout, in combination with images or symbols. It is a format created for people who are not familiar with English, or who have low literacy, or those with a [learning or intellectual disability](https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/node/69). The [Australian Government Style Manual](https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/content-types/easy-read) gives a good overview of Easy Read.

### [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)](https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/)

The [WCAG guidelines](https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/) are the most used guidelines for accessible web development. They make digital content universally accessible.

There are three levels of WCAG:

* Level A: the minimum level
* Level AA: the medium level
* Level AAA: the highest level

In Victoria, all digital content and websites must, at a minimum, meet the current WCAG version Level AA. As of January 2025, this is WCAG 2.2. We encourage people to aim for Level AAA where possible.

#### Single digital presence

Some departments can only add to, remove or edit the on-page content. The site-wide design and functionality are the responsibility of the single digital presence team at the Department of Government Services.

If you have a suggestion about how the functionality or site-wide design could be made more accessible contact the Department of Government Services single digital presence team.

For departments and agencies not using single digital presence, contact your department digital, communications or IT teams.

#### Tools to help

There are site analysis and improvement tools to help monitor and maintain website accessibility standards. Some of the tools available include [Acquia Optimize (formerly Monsido)](https://www.acquia.com/products/acquia-optimize/features/web-accessibility) and [Siteimprove](https://www.siteimprove.com/).

Every department and agency should consider using a site analysis and improvement tool.

#### Working with external providers

This policy and the requirement to meet the current WCAG version Level AA extends to all suppliers and vendors developing digital materials for a Victoria Public Sector or Special body.

It is the responsibility of staff to ensure contracts include this requirement for deliverables and that the final products are compliant.

### Brand

All Victorian Government communication and advertising must follow the guidelines set out in [Brand Victoria](https://www.vic.gov.au/brand-victoria-guidelines-logos).

Brand Victoria is the look and feel (graphics, typography and navigation) for the Victorian Government. If you produce anything for the State Government of Victoria – including an agency or statutory body – you must follow these brand guidelines.

It provides an overview of how the combination of brand elements has an important role in accessibility. It also has detailed information on the accessibility colour palette, with recommended font sizes.

By following the Brand Victoria guidelines and picking colours from the approved palette and themes you can ensure content will be ‘accessible by design’.

## Images

We often use still images, graphics, icons and infographics to communicate. It is important to consider whether you need to use these images in your communication. If you do, it is important to make sure they are accessible.

### When to use images

Your images must directly relate to the content and help you clearly communicate your message. It must add value beyond simply being decorative. Only include images that visually support your text, explain complex concepts or provide context.

### Images of text

Do not use images of text. They are often inaccessible and hard to read on small screens. Use actual text instead to ensure readability. If text in an image is necessary, provide the same information in an accessible format, such as a caption or alt text.

#### Alt text

Alt text (alternative text) is a brief description of the image. All images must have alt text provided.

For more information, Microsoft Office has a helpful article on [everything you need to know about alt text](https://support.microsoft.com/en-au/office/everything-you-need-to-know-to-write-effective-alt-text-df98f884-ca3d-456c-807b-1a1fa82f5dc2).

### Colour contrast

Colour is an important part of visual communication but can present challenges for users with colour vision impairments.

Do not rely solely on colour to convey meaning. Instead, use patterns, labels, or text alongside colour to ensure the message is clear to all users.

It is also important to make sure the colour contrast between text and background meets accessibility standards.

Use free products like the [WebAIM colour contrast checker](https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/) to make sure you have the required colour contrast.

## Alternate formats

An alternate format is any different way of presenting print information. This could be audio, braille, large print or Easy Read. If requested by someone, every printed publication must be available in all these formats.

The following statement must be included in all printed publications:

“To receive this document in another format such as large print or audio, phone [insert contact name and contact phone number] or email [insert contact name and contact email address].”

The [National Relay Service](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https%3A/www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/phone/services-people-disability/accesshub/national-relay-service__;!!C5rN6bSF!H73u_a0o09fuNgZ3pkjTd8XGM5E21cbAo1hUFwaGPKKfTeW5DYoyRP80xjmV63AxmUu0GqkGUWJT5hiy7pxRpxriSYP2KZiwn1c$) is available as a phone solution for people who are d/Deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment. It's available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week Australia-wide. All calls are confidential.

**National Relay Service (NRS)**

If you are d/Deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech/communication difficulty please contact us by:

**Step 1**

Contact us through your preferred NRS call channel detailed on [NRS call numbers and links](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https%3A/www.accesshub.gov.au/about-the-nrs/nrs-call-numbers-and-links__;!!C5rN6bSF!BiBAj-h87t5m6NVj_d03duOMy3td8bZECGsgXO1XL6YoOxwU2vDc9j5Zskw7D8OBKgvpqFUnstIRLEPO6FUFGVi5wFZluW8xHhI$).

**Step 2**

Provide the NRS with our phone number [contact phone number].

This document can also be found in HTML format on our website [insert link].”

The phone and email added to the statement must be the team who authored the publication.

For information on creating alternate formats contact [insert appropriate department email].

### Producing alternate formats

Creating alternate formats of print documents is a specialised skill. It’s important to engage a qualified professional to produce them.

All alternate formats must be prepared so all meaningful text, imagery, audio, diagrams and references found in the original are accessible.

### Video and audio

All new videos produced by Victorian Public Service bodies and Special bodies must include closed captions. If you use auto-generated closed captions make sure to check they are correct before publishing your video. It is good practice to also provide a transcript of your video.

All audio produced by Victorian Public Service bodies and Special bodies must have a transcript accompanying it.

#### Auslan and audio description

Auslan is the sign language of the Australian Deaf community. It is a visual-spatial language. It is not just English expressed through hand signs and facial expressions. For some people who are d/Deaf, Auslan is their first language.

Audio description is added narration to a video providing details on the movements, gestures, props, settings, costumes and scenery. The audio description is woven between the dialogue. It is important for people who are blind or live with low vision and can also be helpful for people who need help to understand what is being shown on screen.

This policy details the minimum requirements for video produced by Victorian Public Service bodies and Special bodies. You should consider when producing video whether a version with an Auslan interpreter should also be produced and if you should include audio description.

### PDF files and web pages

PDF files are a common file type but are hard to make accessible.

Web pages are the best way to present information online. It is the most accessible format, is easier to view on mobile phones and is good for search engine optimisation.

All content on websites should be presented as web pages. Where possible, a PDF file will only be uploaded if there is another version also provided. This other version could be a web page or a Microsoft Word document.

If you have a PDF that can’t be uploaded as a web page and you can’t provide a second version, contact your strategic communications team and/or digital publishing team to discuss options.

Microsoft Word can be made more accessible than other file formats. It’s important to remember, you still need to check your document is accessible. You can do this using the [Accessibility Checker.](https://support.microsoft.com/en-au/office/improve-accessibility-with-the-accessibility-checker-a16f6de0-2f39-4a2b-8bd8-5ad801426c7f)

Note: once you have created a web page version of your document, that is the accessible version. You do not need to provide anything further.

## Content in scope

This policy only applies to content published (online or in print) after the policy takes effect.

Every two years, each department or agency will review their intranet and websites. During this review, they will assess existing content against this policy and update, remove or archive it.

Content and publications created before this policy was introduced, like old annual reports, are not required to follow it. However, no other exceptions apply.

## Roles and responsibilities

All staff of Victorian Public Service and Special bodies are responsible for creating accessible information and communication. Departments and their respective agencies should make training available to staff to make sure staff have the skills to do this.

A ‘roles and responsibilities’ matrix is provided at Appendix 1.

Your strategic communications team and/or digital publishing team can answer any questions you might have about the policy and your obligations.

## Policy review

The Department of Premier and Cabinet will review the accessible communication policy every two years from endorsement.

## Appendix 1

### Roles and responsibilities matrix

In this table the word ‘content’ is used to describe all forms of information and communication detailed under the scope above.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Who** | **Role** |
| Identify target audience | Policy/program staffCommunicationsDigitalCampaigns | Determine the best medium for communication based on the target audience i.e. audio, video, web copy, print ads, social media. |
| Draft content | CommunicationsDigitalPolicy/program staffCampaignsMarketing or comms agencies | Ensure content is:* correct, complete and current
* written in plain language
* has a reading level of Year 8
* meets Brand Victoria guidelines.
 |
| Edit and proofread | Managers | * Review content for grammar, spelling and style according to Whole of Victorian Government (WoVG) style guide
* Change content to ensure it meets this policy
* Give feedback (if any) to author.
 |
| Approve | ManagersExecutive | * Confirm content meets this policy
* Approve content
 |
| Publish | Digital publishers | * Provide final check that content meets this policy, paying close attention to WCAG
* Give feedback (if any) to content author and manager
* Do not publish content and return to the approver if it does not meet this policy
* Publish content online if it meets this policy.
 |

## Appendix 2

### Training and resources available

#### **Training**

1. The Department of Government Services and Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action provide a monthly training. Visit the [SDP community of practice on the Innovation Network](https://innovationnetwork.vic.gov.au/my-network/groups/46/group-events).
2. The plain language community of practice has three training sessions available
	1. [Plain language part 1: word choices](https://innovationnetwork.vic.gov.au/on-demand-event/plain-language-word-choices)
	2. [Plain language part 2: formatting](https://innovationnetwork.vic.gov.au/on-demand-event/plain-language-formatting-0)
	3. [Plain language part 3: collaboration](https://innovationnetwork.vic.gov.au/on-demand-event/plain-language-collaboration)
3. Most departments have access to a Plain language writing for government eLearn on their Learning Management System.

#### **Resources**

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and pay our respect to them, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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To receive this document in an alternative format, phone **03 9651 5111**, email **contact@dpc.vic.gov.au**, or contact National Relay Service on **1800 555 660** if required.

##### Victorian Government digital guides

A variety of [digital guides](https://www.vic.gov.au/digital-guides) to make it easier to understand and implement your responsibilities. There are more than 15 guides covering different elements of digital accessibility.

##### Plain language toolkit

A [plain language toolkit](https://innovationnetwork.vic.gov.au/toolkits/plain-language-resources) on the Innovation Network with resources to help you to write in plain language. Includes training, guidance, toolkits, and podcasts.

##### Online accessibility toolkit

The South Australian Government’s Online Accessibility Toolkit ([accessibility.sa.gov.au](http://www.accessibility.sa.gov.au/)) is a free publicly available online resource.