Most Utah COVID Vaccine Sign-Up Pages Have Accessibility Errors | CPD Blog

JoLynne Lyon

03/09/2021

Most of the websites that Utahns use to sign up for the COVID vaccine contain accessibility errors that could potentially prevent people with disabilities from signing up independently, according to a recent review from WebAIM.

The nonprofit, part of the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University, is dedicated to ensuring web accessibility.

The Utah report is a follow-up to a national evaluation released earlier this month. WebAIM collaborated with Kaiser Health News on a study of COVID vaccination sites from every state in the country and Washington, DC. The report found accessibility problems on nearly all of the 94 sites it examined, prompting 11 senators to write the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Human Service’s civil rights office. The letter asks that they prioritize the accessibility of vaccination websites.

WebAIM then took a closer look at websites used by Utahns to sign up for vaccines. Of the 50 pages evaluated, 48 showed accessibility errors, with an average of 23 detected per page. (By comparison, the group’s most recent analysis on the top 1 million homepages in the US showed an average of 61 errors per page). However, many of the issues still had the potential of preventing people with disabilities from signing up online.

The most common error by far was low contrast text. Of the pages evaluated, 35 of the 50 contained contrast errors. “It really impacts everybody,” said Jared Smith, WebAIM’s associate director. “For users with low vision, which is a pretty significant population, poor contrast can make content very difficult for them to read.”

Missing form labels were another common error, making it difficult for users who need technology to read the computer screen to know what information should go in a fill-in-the-blank electronic form. Twenty of the pages evaluated contained this error.

In both the national and Utah-specific evaluation, WebAIM used WAVE, an automated tool that checks pages for accessibility errors. The tool cannot detect all accessibility problems, but it’s a good indicator of how accessibility-conscious an organization’s website is.

The evaluation of webpages where Utahns can sign up for vaccines was done on Saturday, March 6. It is a snapshot in time of pages from local health departments and private providers that offer the COVID-19 vaccine.

“Most of the accessibility barriers detected can be readily fixed,” Smith said. “Because COVID-19 disproportionately impacts many with disabilities and the elderly (the population most likely to have a disability), and because access to the vaccine is so critical for these people, web-based barriers to register for the vaccination is especially impactful on the population that needs it most.”