

New York Agencies Commit to Vaccine Website Accessibility

Jared Smith

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On October 5, the United States Attorney's Office in the Eastern district of New York [announced agreements](#) reached to improve accessibility of COVID-19 vaccination websites across several government entities. WebAIM, a non-profit based at the Institute for Disability Research, Policy and Practice at Utah State University, provided information on accessibility issues across these entities' websites. WebAIM was specifically thanked by the Attorney's Office.

The agreement will fix accessibility problems that stand between people with visual impairments and the COVID-19 vaccination websites of five New York state and local agencies.

In early 2021, WebAIM tested the vaccine websites for all 50 states and found significant issues on most of them. In collaboration with Kaiser Health News, [an article](#)

[was written](#) that encouraged government involvement in addressing these issues. In response, [several senators addressed the Department of Justice and Department of Health and Human Services in March](#), requesting that vaccination sites become accessible across the states.

This Department of Justice agreement is a result of awareness raised by the WebAIM team and the efforts of many to highlight the significant impacts that inaccessible web sites can have on individuals with disabilities, a population highly impacted by the COVID pandemic.

Information for Improvement

WebAIM wants individuals with disabilities to have equal access to online resources, especially when it comes to accessing healthcare during a worldwide pandemic. Jared Smith, Associate Director at WebAIM, evaluated accessibility across 94 state-level COVID-19 information and vaccine pages and shared the data, hoping for change. "I primarily wanted to inform that accessibility issues were present on these important pages. I hoped that it might also bring about change—and many states, departments of health, and vaccine vendors did take the information and make improvements to their websites."

More Effort Needed

Following the simple discovery WebAIM made using its automated [WAVE accessibility test tool](#), followed by sharing that information, many in the aging and disabled populations can now navigate the COVID vaccine websites and obtain important information, which ultimately gives them the opportunity to receive the vaccine. Smith said, "It's important that the Department of Justice is engaged in addressing potential discrimination against users with disabilities, especially in regard to something as critical as COVID-19 vaccine information and registration. While this settlement is with only a few governmental entities, it does send a message that this is an important topic and that public entities must implement reasonable efforts to ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Unfortunately, the reality is that much of the web poses notable barriers to these users, so additional effort is needed to bring web accessibility to the forefront."

More up-to-date information on web accessibility is available at [WebAIM.org](#).