

## Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing

# Minimum publishing standards for health websites in Australia

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Produced by Health*Insite* for the Government Health Websites Forum. Version 1, December 2008.

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The Government Health Websites Forum is a group of representatives of the Commonwealth, State and Territory government health department websites. The Forum encourages the adoption of these standards, as a minimum, by health websites in Australia, particularly those that are funded under government contracts.

Endorsed by the Health*Insite* Editorial Board, 12 December 2008.

### ***Introduction***

This document is written for content managers and web developers of health websites in Australia. It is not intended to cover all aspects of good website design; obviously you will aim to make your website useful, attractive, consistent, fast to load and easy to navigate. Rather, the emphasis is on some additional criteria relating to the trustworthiness, accessibility and findability of information on your site.

The standards are based on the mandatory requirements listed in the *Publishing standards for HealthInsite*<sup>1</sup>.

The term 'resource' is used to describe a published item (for example, a web page or a fact sheet) or a collection of items. There is a focus on 'documents' and similar resources but the same principles generally apply to other resource types such as multimedia.

### ***1. Quality of information***

Sites must have **written** protocols that:

- include a policy that each resource is authored, or authorised, by a person or group with appropriate qualifications or experience
- include a procedure for appropriate attribution of sources
- include a review process (with capacity for review prior to initial placement onto the site and at appropriate intervals to ensure currency). The policy needs to cite positions, qualifications or names of reviewers.
- detail the final approval process (including responsibility or qualifications of approver)

- address conflict of interest (for example if an author, authoriser or site owner has a commercial interest in a product being described)
- include a policy on advertising
- include a process for consumer consultation, audience testing or user feedback
- ensure that sites observe the copyright restrictions on any material (including images and other media) used in resource preparation.

## **2. Publication details**

Using search engines or links from other sites, a user may reach a resource on your site directly, without the context of navigating from the site's home page. Hence each HTML page, PDF document or other resource must have individual, explicit publication details.

Each resource must have:

- clear publisher identification
- a clear title
- the date of publication or, if the resource content has been significantly updated, the date of last content update. If the resource has been **fully** reviewed and judged to be current, but has not been updated, the date of last review is acceptable.
- a contact point for requesting further information - this may be a standard feedback link to the site webmaster
- a disclaimer notice. It is recommended that a disclaimer notice be placed on any resource offering health advice or that a link be provided to a site disclaimer notice. It is preferred that this be a simple notice that the resource is of an educational nature rather than a complex legalistic disclaimer of all liability.

Furthermore:

- Archival material which is retained on a site must be clearly labelled. This applies particularly to publications which are no longer current but are retained for reference and research.

The date of publication or date of update should be assigned by the author, approver or publisher as part of the publishing workflow. **The date should not be automatically assigned by a computer.** There are very few exceptions to this principle. It is important to distinguish between changes in content of a resource and changes in presentation because changes in presentation do not usually constitute a content update. A user will assume that a date on a resource is the date for which that resource was current.

## **3. Resource formats**

- Documents must be provided using non-proprietary formats such as HTML and PDF. For consumer information and short documents, HTML is the preferred format, because of its linking functionality. For long documents and documents with special layouts, PDF will be a better format for many users. However, note

- that there are accessibility issues with the PDF format. It is helpful to offer an alternative version, preferably HTML.
- HTML documents must conform to current specifications of HTML or XHTML. Note that documents conforming to earlier versions of the HTML specifications will automatically conform to later versions.
  - A multi-page HTML document must contain a top page with the full identification information and a contents list. There should be a link to it from every subsequent page.

#### **4. Accessibility**

- Sites must be compliant with the Australian Disability Discrimination Act, following the guidelines produced by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC): *World Wide Web Access: Disability Discrimination Act Advisory Notes*<sup>5</sup>. These guidelines are easy to read and are a good introduction to the more technical W3C documentation.
- Sites must meet Level A conformance with the *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)*<sup>6</sup> produced by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). Note that WCAG 1.0 is currently being updated to WCAG 2.0.

In particular:

- The document HTML code for images must include an alternative informative textual description of the image for use by text-only browsers and text readers. If the image is purely decorative, the document HTML code should use an empty alt attribute (alt="").
- Long descriptions must be provided for complex images if they are not described in the page text.
- Image maps must be accompanied by text equivalent menus.
- To ensure accessibility of multimedia resources, alternative equivalent content such as text captions, auditory descriptions or transcripts must be provided.

#### **5. Additional requirements for HealthInsite eligibility**

HealthInsite is an Internet gateway designed to provide Australians with easy access to reliable, high quality health information online. HealthInsite links to resources on the websites of its information partners. Organisations whose websites meet the requirements of Sections 1 to 4 above, and the additional requirements below, are eligible to apply for an information partnership. HealthInsite partners can display the HealthInsite logo on their sites as a mark of high quality. Partners also benefit from visitors being drawn to their sites via HealthInsite.

Further information about information partnerships can be found on the site ([www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)). Further information about publishing requirements, including metadata requirements, can be found in the *Publishing standards for HealthInsite*<sup>1</sup>.

- To be included in *HealthInsite*, a PDF document or multimedia resource must have a discrete HTML cover page. This requirement enables *HealthInsite* to provide specific indexing for the resource, which increases the chance that the resource will be found by a user. The cover page should describe the document sufficiently for the user to decide whether or not to open or download it, including instructions for downloading and file size.
- To be included in *HealthInsite*, there must be a metadata record with a minimum of 8 elements for each resource:

**Creator:** The name of the person or organisation primarily responsible for the content of the resource.

**Publisher:** The name of the entity responsible for making the resource available, often the name of the site owner.

**Title:** The name given to the resource.

**Description:** A brief textual description of the content and/or purpose of the resource.

**Language:** The language of the content of the resource.

**Date Modified:** The date when the content of the resource was last significantly updated.

**Format:** The data format of the resource.

**Identifier:** The URL for the resource.

This metadata is used by *HealthInsite* to make searching more precise and for search result displays. *HealthInsite* follows the Australian AGLS metadata standard which is based on the international Dublin Core standard.

- This metadata must be made available in a way that can be harvested. It must be updated when the content of a resource is significantly updated.

## **Further resources**

### **Website standards**

1. Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, HealthInsite Editorial Team. *Publishing standards for HealthInsite*. June 2007

This is the full version of the standards used by HealthInsite information partners.

[http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/content/publishing\\_standards.cfm](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/content/publishing_standards.cfm)

2. Standards Australia. *AGLS metadata element set* (Australian Standard AS 5004.1-2002 and AS5044.2-2002)

This is the Australian standard for metadata. A new version is expected to be released in 2009.

<http://www.naa.gov.au/records-management/publications/AGLS-Element.aspx>

3. Health On the Net Foundation. *HON code of conduct (HONcode) for medical and health web sites*

<http://www.hon.ch>

4. Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO). *Better practice checklists & guides*

<http://www.finance.gov.au/e-government/better-practice-and-collaboration/better-practice-checklists/index.html>

### **Accessibility standards**

5. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). *World Wide Web Access: Disability Discrimination Act Advisory Notes*. August 2002

HREOC has responsibility for promoting the objectives of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and provides advice about the implications of the Act for website operators.

[http://www.humanrights.gov.au/disability\\_rights/standards/www\\_3/www\\_3.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/disability_rights/standards/www_3/www_3.html).

6. World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines*. The guidelines provide a series of checkpoints and priority levels that can be used to ensure that websites are accessible.

WCAG 1.0 (1999)

<http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT>

WCAG 2.0 (2008)

<http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>

7. Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) homepage

<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>

8. Further information about multimedia accessibility

<http://www.w3.org/TR/SMIL-access/>