



WCAG History – 1999 to 2025

The Complete Timeline (as of November 2025)

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One-Page Visual Timeline (print this page and stick it on your wall)

Year	Version	What Actually Happened	Real-World Impact
1999	WCAG 1.0	W3C drops 14 guidelines, priority levels, and “use alt text” for the first time.	Nobody reads it.
2008	WCAG 2.0	POUR + 12 guidelines + success criteria. Technology-neutral.	Everyone still ignores it.
2012–2017	Mobile boom	Smartphones explode. WCAG 2.0 suddenly matters because people actually use websites on phones.	First lawsuits start.
2018	WCAG 2.1	17 new criteria (mostly mobile): touch target size, orientation, contrast enhancements, etc.	Lawsuit tsunami begins in the US.
2023	WCAG 2.2	9 new AA/AAA criteria (Focus Not Obscured, Target Spacing, Accessible Authentication, etc.)	EU’s European Accessibility Act references 2.2.
2024–2025	Legal reality	DOJ officially says Title II & III apply to websites. EAA enforcement starts. Canada, Australia, Israel follow.	“We’ll fix it later” is dead.

The Full Story

1999 – WCAG 1.0 – The Dark Ages

- 14 guidelines, Priority 1/2/3 checkpoints, written for HTML 3.2 and early CSS.
- Famous for “alt text exists” and “don’t use tables for layout.”
- Almost nobody outside of government sites cared.

2008 – WCAG 2.0 – The “Technology-Neutral” Revolution

- Introduces POUR (Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, Robust)
- 12 guidelines → 61 testable success criteria (A, AA, AAA)
- Finally works for Flash, JavaScript, PDFs, mobile... in theory.
- Most companies still treated AA as optional.

2012–2017 – Mobile Changes Everything

- Touchscreens everywhere → WCAG 2.0’s keyboard and reflow rules suddenly matter.
- First big US lawsuits (Target, Domino’s early cases).
- Developers start learning the word “a11y”.

2018 – WCAG 2.1 – The Mobile & Lawsuit Fix

- Adds 17 new success criteria (mostly Level A and AA)
- Key additions: 1.4.10 Reflow, 1.4.11 Non-text Contrast, 1.4.12 Text Spacing, 1.4.13 Content on Hover/Focus, 2.5.1–2.5.4 Pointer Gestures & Motion
- Becomes the new legal baseline in most countries.

2023 – WCAG 2.2 – The Quiet Breaker

- 9 new success criteria (2 become AA)
- Big ones: 2.4.11 Focus Not Obscured, 2.5.8 Target Spacing, 3.3.8 Accessible Authentication, 3.2.6 Consistent Help
- Published May 2023 → becomes the EU reference standard under the European Accessibility Act.

2024–2025 – The Legal Hammer Drops

- US DOJ (2024): Title II & Title III apply to websites → no more “internet isn’t a place of public accommodation” argument.
- European Accessibility Act enforcement starts 2025.
- Canada, Australia, Israel, and others adopt WCAG 2.1 or 2.2 AA as law.
- WCAG 3.0 (Silver) is in draft → probably 2027–2028.

Where We Stand in November 2025

- WCAG 2.1 AA = still the global legal baseline for most jurisdictions.
- WCAG 2.2 AA = required for full EAA compliance in Europe and increasingly referenced elsewhere.
- Automated tools catch ~30 % of issues. The rest is manual (keyboard, screen readers, real humans).