Accessiblü

Managed Digital Accessibility Ops

Accessibility Evaluation Report:

Cochrane Library

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Conducted by: Accessiblü, LLC

For: Library Accessibility Alliance (LAA)

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Summary of Accessibility Findings

Accessiblü conducted a high-level accessibility evaluation of the Cochrane Library, accessed via the University of Washington's library portal, to assess its usability for individuals with disabilities. The review was conducted using the JAWS 2025 screen reader on Windows 11 with Google Chrome, keyboard-only navigation, and manual inspection, supplemented by automated scanning with axe DevTools, for conformance with select WCAG 2.2 AA success criteria.

The Cochrane Library is a globally recognized collection of databases containing high-quality, independent evidence for healthcare decision-making. The platform hosts Cochrane Reviews, systematic reviews and meta-analyses authored by the Cochrane Collaboration, along with Cochrane Protocols, clinical trial records, and Clinical Answers. The evaluation covered four key page types: the main library homepage, a search results page for the query "ovarian cancer," a detailed review article page for a systematic review on prostate cancer screening, and the Advanced Search page.

The Cochrane Library demonstrates several features that serve as a good foundation for accessibility, including a skip-to-content link, meaningful landmark regions (banner, navigation, main, and content information), a well-organized filter panel on search results, and clearly structured review content organized under recognizable sections such as Abstract, Methods, Results, and Authors' Conclusions. The PICO framework used on review pages provides structured information that benefits all users, including those using assistive technology.

That said, the evaluation identified a number of areas across all four pages that may create challenges for users relying on screen readers, keyboard navigation, and other assistive technologies. The most significant barriers center on interactive controls that are programmatically coded as the wrong element type, missing status messages when search results update or load, keyboard focus management issues on the search page, and data tables on review articles that lack proper header markup. Addressing these areas would meaningfully improve the experience for researchers, clinicians, and library patrons who rely on assistive technologies to access Cochrane's evidence-based health information.

Key Findings

Across all four pages tested, screen reader users encountered a recurring pattern: interactive elements intended to open menus, trigger content updates, or switch between content types were programmatically coded as simple links or static text rather than buttons, tabs, or other appropriate roles. This meant JAWS announced them with no indication that activating them would change page state. Navigation items across the site, the content-type tabs on search results, the collapse/expand controls on review articles, and the language selector buttons all fall into this pattern.

Beyond role mismatches, the search experience creates two significant barriers: a partial keyboard trap that occurs when the search autocomplete activates, cycling focus back to the top of the page when users attempt to Tab forward, and the complete absence of status messages when search results load or filters are applied. A screen reader user who submits a search query or applies a date filter receives no confirmation that anything changed.

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On individual review pages, in-text citation links are not visually distinguishable from surrounding body text in a way that is independent of color, which affects users with color vision deficiencies. Data tables presenting clinical findings lack proper header markup, making structured navigation by row and column impossible for screen reader users.

Top 3 Issues Identified

1. **Interactive Controls Coded with Incorrect Roles Across All Pages**

   a. Description of the issue: Navigation menu items (Cochrane Reviews, Searching for Trials, etc.) are coded as links but open dropdown submenus, requiring button semantics with aria-haspopup and aria-expanded attributes. The Cochrane Reviews / Protocols / Trials / Editorials / Clinical Answers tabs on search results behave as tab panels but are coded as links, and collapse/expand controls use non-interactive elements with aria-label attributes placed on <i> tags, which is a prohibited ARIA use.

   b. Impact: Screen reader users cannot determine the function or state of these controls without activating them, adding significant overhead to every navigation and search task. Every page on the platform is affected.

   c. WCAG Success Criteria: 4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A); 1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)

2. **Search Field Creates Keyboard Partial Trap with No Status Messages**

   a. Description of the issue: When a search is submitted or filters are applied, JAWS receives no programmatic notification. Focus returns to the top of the page and no live region announces the result count. The search autocomplete creates a partial keyboard trap: attempting to Tab away from the search field cycles focus back to the top of the page rather than moving forward, requiring Escape key intervention that is not communicated to the user.

   b. Impact: Keyboard-only and screen reader users must navigate the entire page structure multiple times to locate updated results, with no confirmation that their interactions registered correctly. This affects every search and filter operation.

   c. WCAG Success Criteria: 2.1.2 No Keyboard Trap (A); 4.1.3 Status Messages (AA); 2.4.3 Focus Order (AA)

3. **Review Article Data Tables Lack Header Markup and Links Lack Visual Differentiation**

   a. Description of the issue: Summary of findings tables and evidence tables on review pages have no table header (<th>) elements and no scope attributes, making structured cell-by-cell navigation impossible. In-text citation links throughout review articles are distinguished from surrounding body text only by color (dark navy on black), with no underline or other non-color indicator.

   b. Impact: Researchers and clinicians with visual impairments cannot navigate evidence tables effectively. Users with color vision deficiencies cannot identify inline citations. These barriers affect the platform’s primary content delivery function.

   c. WCAG Success Criteria: 1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A); 1.4.1 Use of Color (A)

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Disabilities Impacted

Blind and Low-Vision Users

Issues: Screen reader users encounter controls announced with the wrong role throughout the platform, missing ARIA states on navigation menus and content-type tabs, a partial keyboard trap in the search field, no live region announcements when search results update, inaccessible data tables on review pages, and untitled iframes on the search results page.

Impact: These barriers compound across a typical research workflow. A blind researcher navigating to the Cochrane Library, searching for a topic, applying filters, and opening a review article encounters role mismatches, missing feedback, and navigation confusion at nearly every step. The data tables containing clinical evidence are not fully navigable.

Users with Motor Disabilities

Issues: Navigation menus that function as dropdowns but are coded as links require mouse interaction to use intuitively. The partial keyboard trap in the search field requires Escape key knowledge to resolve. Collapse/expand controls on review article sections require repeated interaction to determine their state.

Impact: Keyboard-only users, switch device users, and users of voice control software will encounter unpredictable focus behavior during search operations and must Tab through considerable page structure after each search interaction.

Neurodiverse Users

Issues: The heading hierarchy on the homepage jumps from H1 to H2 to H4 without an H3, creating structural confusion. The absence of status messages after dynamic content updates means users receive no confirmation that their actions worked. The non-standard date entry format on the date range filter is not communicated to users, and error messages for invalid entries are not announced programmatically.

Impact: Users who benefit from predictable page structure, explicit action feedback, and clearly communicated input requirements will find the search and filter experience frustrating. The lack of status messages is particularly challenging for users who need explicit confirmation that their interactions have registered.

Users with Color Vision Deficiencies

Issues: In-text citation links on review article pages are distinguished from surrounding body text only by color (dark navy #002d64 on black body text), yielding a contrast ratio of approximately 1.55:1 between the link and surrounding text. No underline, border, or other non-color visual indicator is present.

Impact: Users with protanopia, deuteranopia, or other forms of color vision deficiency may not be able to identify inline citations as interactive links within review article text, limiting their ability to explore referenced studies and supporting evidence.

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Page-Specific Findings and Impact Analysis

The following section lists accessibility findings by page and WCAG success criteria and describes their impact on users.

Homepage

https://www-cochranelibrary-com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/

Opportunity Area	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
Decorative Topic Images Exposed to Screen Readers	**1.1.1 Non-text Content (A)**	Illustrative icons and topic category graphics (such as Infectious Diseases, Mental Health, etc.) are exposed to screen readers as unnamed graphic elements rather than being marked decorative. Axe DevTools identified 11 instances of decorative images not properly hidden from assistive technology.	JAWS announces "Infectious Diseases Link Graphic" then reads a link, providing no useful description. Auditor confirmed: "They're illustrations of people - those could be decorative." Axe scan: alt-text-decorative-inappropriate, moderate severity, 11 instances.
Heading Hierarchy Out of Order	**1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)**	The homepage heading structure jumps from H1 directly to H2 and then skips to H4, with no H3 level present. The main content headings in the promotional carousel are also not identified with a heading level when navigated using heading keys.	JAWS heading navigation announces H2 for "Scientific Strategy" and H4 for "Stay Connected With Us" with no H3 in between. Auditor observed: "The H1 is not being announced as a heading at all when using heading navigation keys, and they are out of sequence."
Navigation Dropdown Controls Coded as Links	**4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A)**	The main navigation items (Cochrane Reviews, Searching for Trials, Clinical Answers, About, Help, About Cochrane) are coded as simple links within a list. Each opens a dropdown submenu, which requires button semantics with aria-haspopup and aria-expanded attributes to communicate the presence and state of submenus.	JAWS announces: "List of 6 items. Link Cochrane reviews. Link Searching for Trials. Link Clinical Answers." Auditor confirmed: "They should be buttons with submenus, not links." No expanded/collapsed state is communicated.
Language Selection Modal Does Not Receive Focus	**2.1.2 No Keyboard Trap (A)**	Activating the Review Language or Website Language controls opens a modal dialog, but keyboard focus does not move into the dialog. The user remains behind the dialog with no notification	Auditor Shannon Nix confirmed: "You did not gain focus in the dialogue at all - you're still on the page behind the dialogue." JAWS announced the language controls as two separate links

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Opportunity Area	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
		that it has opened. Controls are coded as links rather than buttons.	with identical text. The focus-modal-none violation was flagged by axe DevTools.
Carousel Previous/Next Buttons Lack Accessible Names	**4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A)**	The promotional content carousel's previous and next navigation buttons have no accessible names. JAWS reads the button labels as Unicode character descriptions, providing no indication of their purpose to screen reader users.	JAWS announces: "Link heavy left pointing angle quotation mark ornament" and "Link heavy right pointing angle quotation mark ornament." Axe DevTools flagged multiple aria-name-missing-incorrect critical violations and aria-role-missing critical violations.

Impact Summary

Screen reader users on the Cochrane homepage face a compounded navigation experience: decorative images add auditory noise without providing information, the heading structure does not reliably communicate page organization, navigation menus announce without indicating their interactive nature, and the language selector modal is effectively inaccessible when using keyboard navigation. Correcting ARIA roles and states on navigation items, properly hiding decorative images, and ensuring modal dialogs receive focus on activation would substantially reduce the effort required to orient to and navigate the homepage.

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Homepage Screenshot

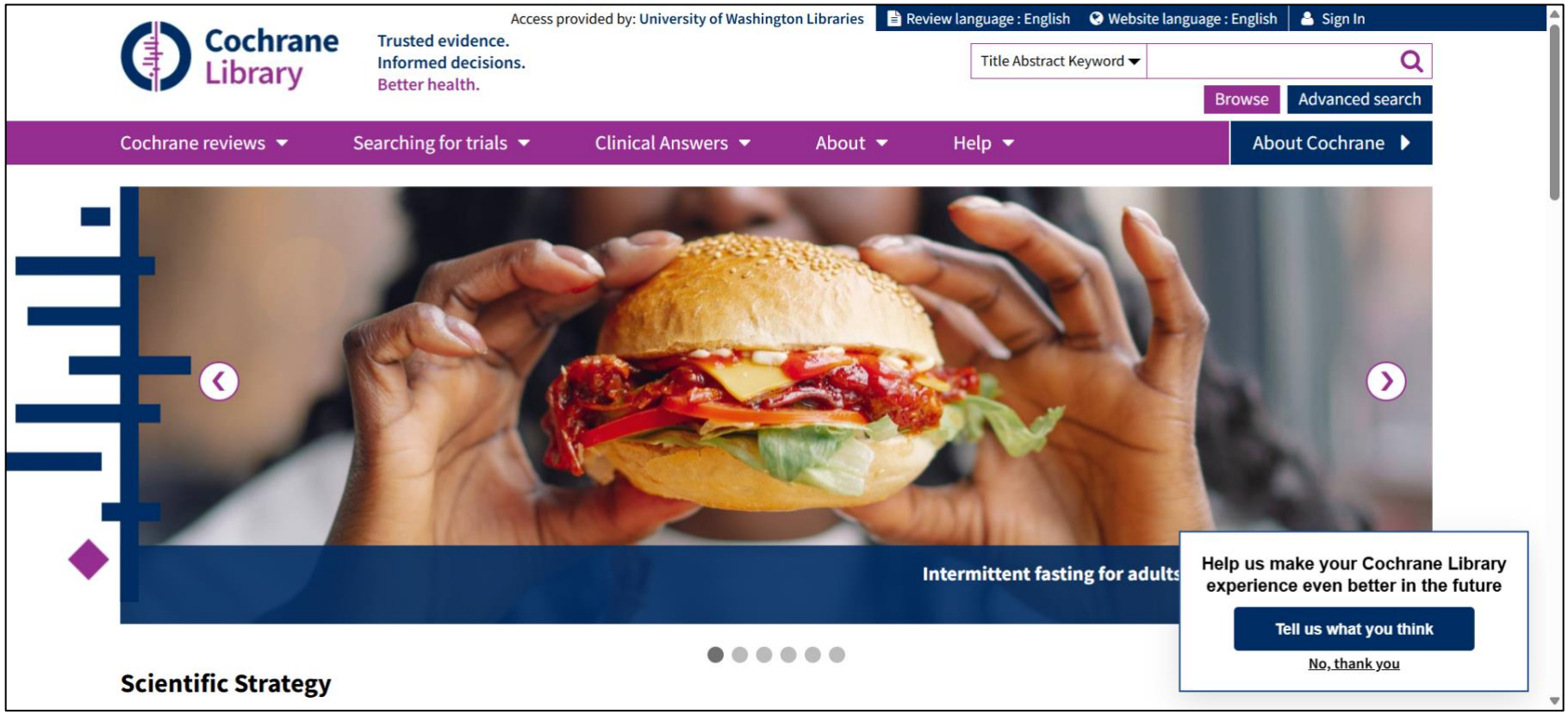

Figure 1: Cochrane Library homepage accessed via University of Washington Libraries, showing the main search bar, promotional content carousel, and subject navigation.

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Search Results Page

https://www-cochranelibrary-com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/search?q=ovarian+cancer

Opportunity Area	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
No Status Message After Search Submission or Filter Application	**4.1.3 Status Messages (AA)** **2.4.3 Focus Order (AA)**	When a search query is submitted or a filter is applied, no ARIA live region announces the updated result count or confirms the action. Focus returns to the top of the page after each interaction rather than moving to the first result or a status element, requiring users to manually navigate the full-page structure repeatedly.	After submitting "ovarian cancer" search, JAWS read only the page title. Auditor confirmed: "No programmatic announcement of results." After applying a date filter: "The results updated but there is no status message. Focus went back to the top of the page."
Search Autocomplete Creates Keyboard Partial Trap	**2.1.2 No Keyboard Trap (A)**	When the search field contains text, the autocomplete suggestion list appears and Tab key behavior becomes unpredictable: attempting to navigate forward from the search field cycles focus back to the top of the page. Users must press Escape to resolve the trap, but this behavior is not announced.	Auditor Rick observed: "Every time I try to scroll past the search field, it is locking me in. My focus reverts back to the top." After pressing Escape, focus returned to the beginning of the page. The behavior repeated each time the user reached the search field while navigating.
Content-Type Tabs Coded as Links with No Selected State	**4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A)**	The result-type selectors (Cochrane Reviews, Cochrane Protocols, Trials, Editorials, Special Collections, Clinical Answers) function as tab panels but are coded as links. There is no tab role, no aria-selected state, and no indication of which panel is currently active.	JAWS announced: "Link Cochrane Reviews 71. Link Cochrane Protocols 12." Auditor Shannon Nix confirmed: "They are tab and tab panels, not links - there is no association." Activating a tab produced a spinning loading indicator with no announcement.
Filter Date Range Input Has Non-Standard Format with No Error Announcement	**3.3.1 Error Identification (A)** **3.3.2 Labels or Instructions (A)**	The custom date range filter uses a DD/MM/YYYY format that is not communicated to users via accessible name or placeholder. When users enter an invalid date, the error message appears visually but is not announced programmatically. The date range also automatically modified entered values without notification.	Auditor: "It does say placeholder, but does not give me the format." Shannon Nix observed: "It says 'end date, please enter a valid date' but it is typed correctly - somehow it cleared the start date without announcement." The date field auto-corrected input silently.

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Opportunity Area	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
Sort and Results-Per-Page Controls Announced as Static Text	**4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A)**	The "Order by" (Relevancy) and "Results per page" (25) controls are announced as static text rather than interactive combo boxes or select elements. Users cannot determine these are interactive controls without activating them.	JAWS announced "Order by. Relevancy. Results per page. Relevancy." and "Results per page. 25." Auditor confirmed: "The sorting is read as static text, not as interactive." Same behavior noted for the Results per page selector.

Impact Summary

The search results page is where most users will spend the majority of their time on the platform, and it presents the most significant usability barriers for screen reader and keyboard users. From initial search submission through filter application and result type selection, users encounter missing status feedback, keyboard traps, and incorrectly coded controls at nearly every interaction point. Implementing ARIA live regions, correcting tab roles and states, and fixing keyboard focus management would transform this page's usability for assistive technology users.

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Search Results Page Screenshot

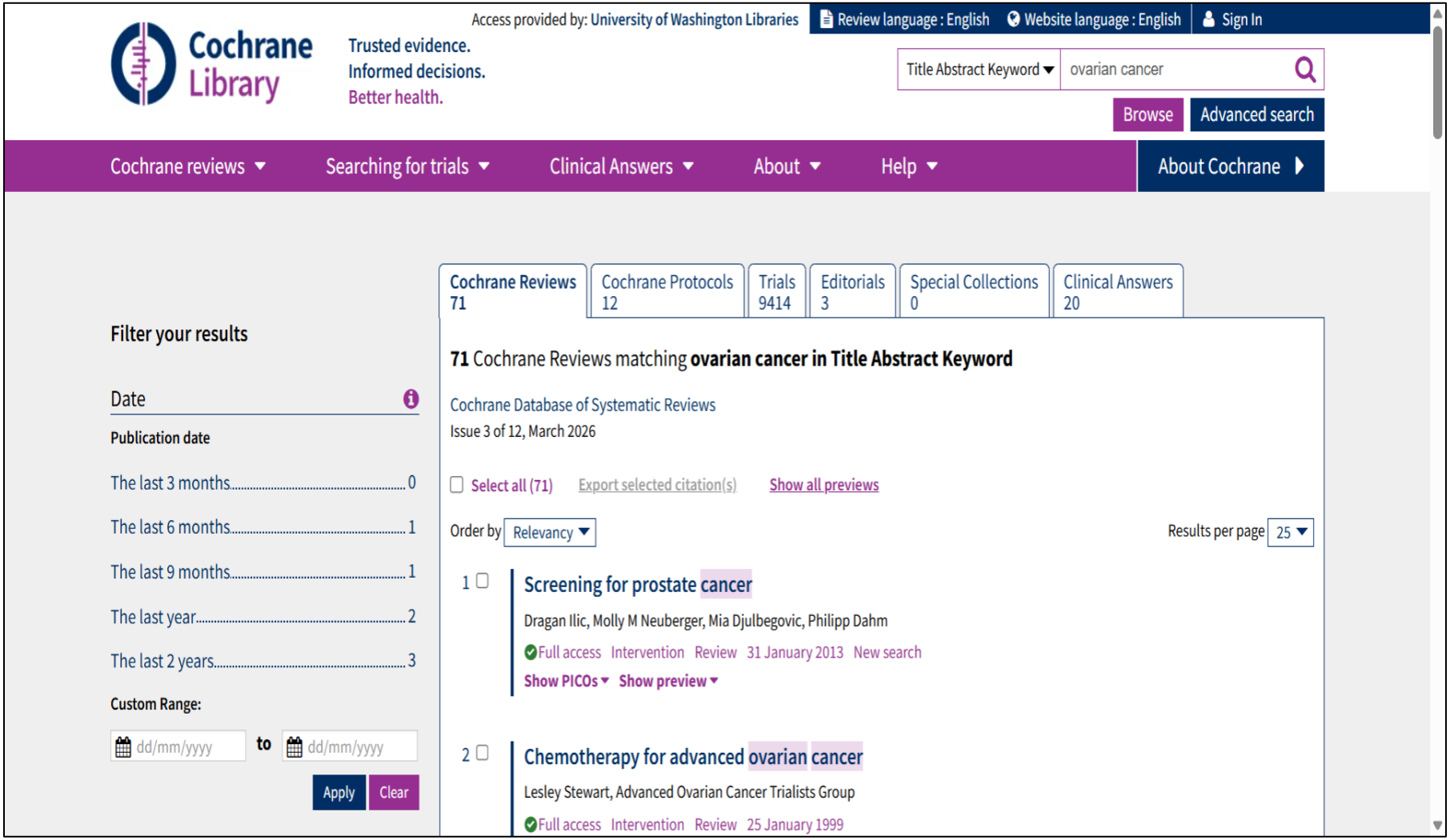

Figure 2: Cochrane Library search results for query "ovarian cancer" showing the left-side filter panel and main results area with Cochrane Reviews tab selected showing 71 results.

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Review Article Page

https://www-cochranelibrary-com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD004720.pub3/full

Opportunity Area	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
In-Text Citation Links Not Distinguishable Without Color	**1.4.1 Use of Color (A)**	Throughout the review article body text, inline citation links are distinguished from surrounding black body text only by a dark navy color (#002d64 on #000000), yielding a contrast ratio of approximately 1.55:1 between the link and surrounding text. No underline, border, or other non-color visual indicator is present. Axe DevTools flagged 314 instances across the article.	Axe scan: link-in-text-block serious violation. Foreground: #002d64, surrounding text: #000000, ratio 1.55:1 (minimum required: 3:1). Source: Version history. Users with color vision deficiencies cannot reliably identify which text elements are links.
Review Article Data Tables Missing Header Markup	**1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)**	Summary of findings tables and evidence tables have no <th> (table header) elements and no scope attributes. This prevents screen readers from associating cell data with its row and column context, making structured table navigation effectively impossible. Axe DevTools flagged 5 instances of the td-has-header critical violation.	JAWS attempted to navigate the 7-column, 13-row summary of findings table but could not navigate column by column in the first two rows. Auditor noted: "I am on row 2 and can't go column by column." Axe scan: td-has-header critical violation flagged across multiple evidence tables.
Heading Hierarchy Skips Levels; Sidebar Reads Before Main Content	**1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)** **1.3.2 Meaningful Sequence (A)**	The article page heading structure jumps from H1 directly to H3 with no H2 level. Additionally, the right-hand sidebar content is read before the main article content due to DOM source order, reversing the logical reading sequence for screen reader users.	JAWS heading navigation: "Cochrane Library Heading Level 1. Contents Heading Level 3. Supplementary Materials Heading Level 3." No H2 present. Shannon Nix confirmed: "It went through the sidebar before the main content - the meaningful sequence is off."
Collapse/Expand Controls Announce as Static Text	**4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A)**	The "Collapse all" and "Expand all" controls at the top of the review article are rendered as static text rather than interactive buttons. Screen reader users cannot activate these controls using keyboard interaction, and their function is not communicated to assistive technology.	JAWS announced "Collapse all, Expand all" as static text. Auditor Rick: "They are read as static text, not buttons." Shannon Nix confirmed: "They should be buttons."

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Opportunity Area	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
Multiple Navigation Landmarks with Identical Labels	**4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A)**	The review article page contains multiple navigation landmark regions that share the same label, making it impossible for screen reader users to distinguish between them using landmark navigation shortcuts. Language links within the abstract section are also not marked up with correct language codes.	JAWS landmarks list: "Navigation Region. Navigation Region. Navigation Region." Auditor: "Multiple navigation regions using the same label." Axe DevTools confirmed the landmark-unique moderate violation.

Impact Summary

The review article page is the core deliverable of the Cochrane Library - the place where researchers access the evidence that informs clinical decisions. Data tables presenting clinical evidence cannot be navigated in a structured way by screen reader users. In-text citations cannot be identified without color vision. The reading order places navigational sidebar content before the article itself. These barriers affect the platform's primary functionality for a significant portion of its potential user base. The structural content of the review is well organized, and the PICO section provides meaningful structured information; extending that same care to data tables and interactive controls would make a substantial difference.

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Review Article Page Screenshot

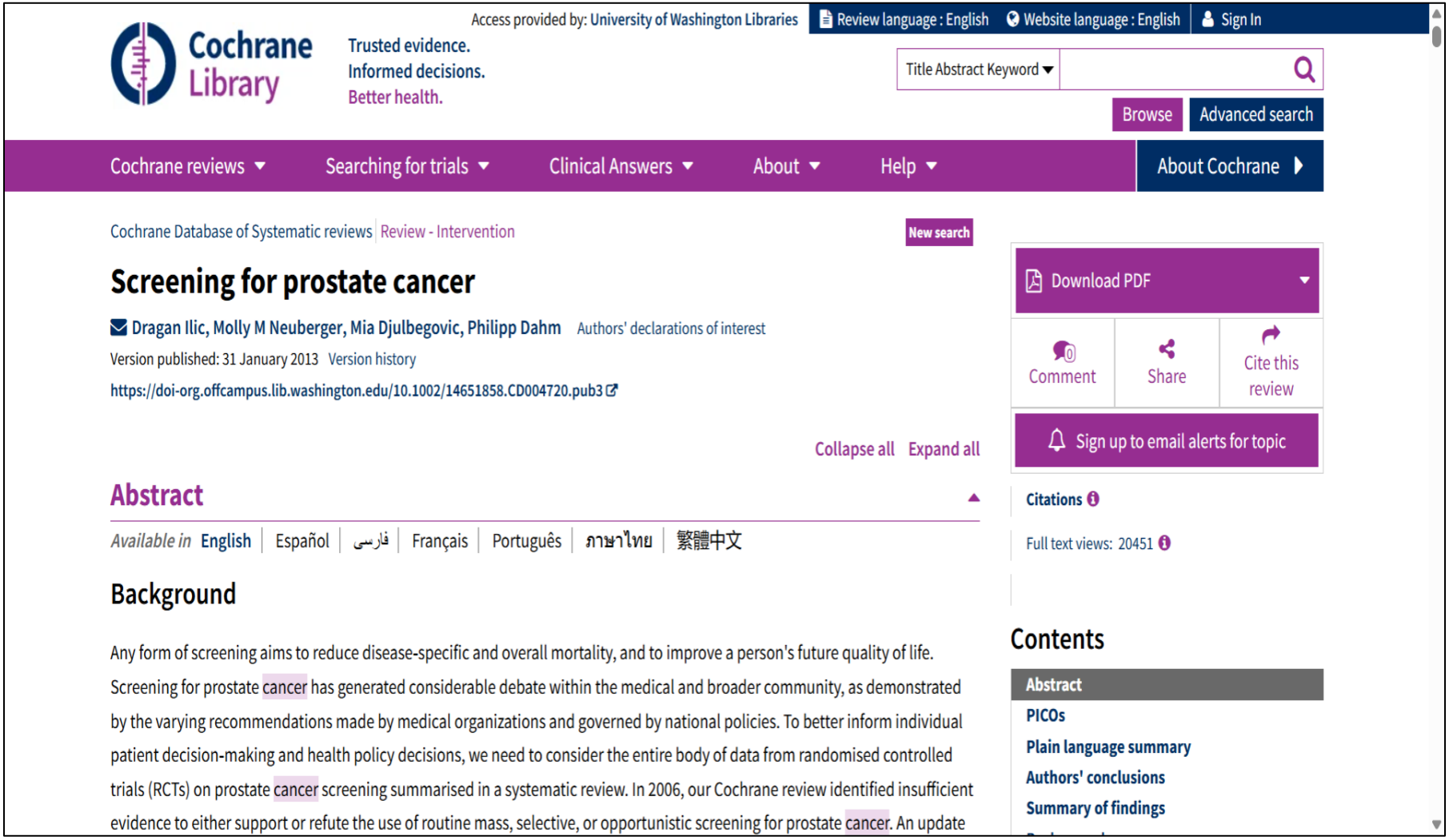

Figure 3: Cochrane Library search results showing the Cochrane Reviews tab with 71 results for "ovarian cancer." Result cards display article title, author names, access badge, content type, publication date, and Show PICOs and Show Preview expand links.

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Advanced Search Page

https://www-cochranelibrary-com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/advanced-search

Opportunity Area	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
Search Field Tabs Coded as Links Rather Than Tab Elements	**1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)** **4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A)**	The four top-level navigation tabs on the Advanced Search page (Search, Search Manager, Medical Terms / MeSH, PICO Search) are coded as links within a list rather than as tab elements with role="tab", role="tablist", and aria-selected state.	JAWS announced: "List of 4 items. Link Search. Link Search Manager. Link Medical Terms (MeSH). Link PICO Search." Shannon Nix: "They should be tab and tab panels, with the associated tab panel." Currently coded as: Search
Search Field Labels Use Title Attribute Only, No Visible Label	**3.3.2 Labels or Instructions (A)**	Both the search field selector (Title Abstract Keyword dropdown) and the search text input field are labeled only via the HTML title attribute, with no visible <label> element or aria-label. Title-only labels are not reliably announced by all screen reader configurations. Axe DevTools flagged both as serious label-title-only violations.	Axe scan: #searchOptions0 - label-title-only serious violation. Source: <select title="Search filter options" name="searchOptions"...>. Axe scan: #searchText0 - label-title-only serious violation. Source: <input title="Type a search term" type="text" placeholder="Type a search term"...>
No Status Message or Focus Management After Search Execution	**4.1.3 Status Messages (AA)** **2.4.3 Focus Order (AA)**	When a search is run from the Advanced Search page, results appear in a new section below the search form but no ARIA live region announces their presence and keyboard focus does not move to the results. Users who submit a search receive no confirmation that results have loaded.	After running a search for "cancer" and pressing Enter, auditor reported: "I get nothing. There is a loading circle - it is not announcing to you." Shannon Nix confirmed: "It did not let you know the page had results." A full results section appeared with no focus shift or status announcement.
Help Text in Instructions Formatted to Resemble Interactive Buttons	**1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)**	Instructional text on the Advanced Search page displays inline UI examples using styled boxes that visually resemble buttons, but these are static informational elements. This creates ambiguity about whether they are interactive and may confuse users about the page interface.	JAWS announced: "Did you know you can now select fields from Search Manager Example button? S button (next to the search box)?" Auditor Shannon Nix: "No, they are just instructions - the formatting is very confusing."

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Impact Summary

The Advanced Search page offers researchers powerful tools for constructing complex queries using Boolean operators, field-specific searching, MeSH medical terminology, and PICO framework inputs. For screen reader and keyboard users, however, the page's accessibility barriers limit access to these capabilities. The search field lacks a visible label, the navigation tabs do not communicate their role or state, and no feedback mechanism confirms when searches complete. Proper label elements, tab ARIA semantics, and a results live region would resolve the primary barriers while preserving all of the page's advanced search functionality.

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Advanced Search Page Screenshot

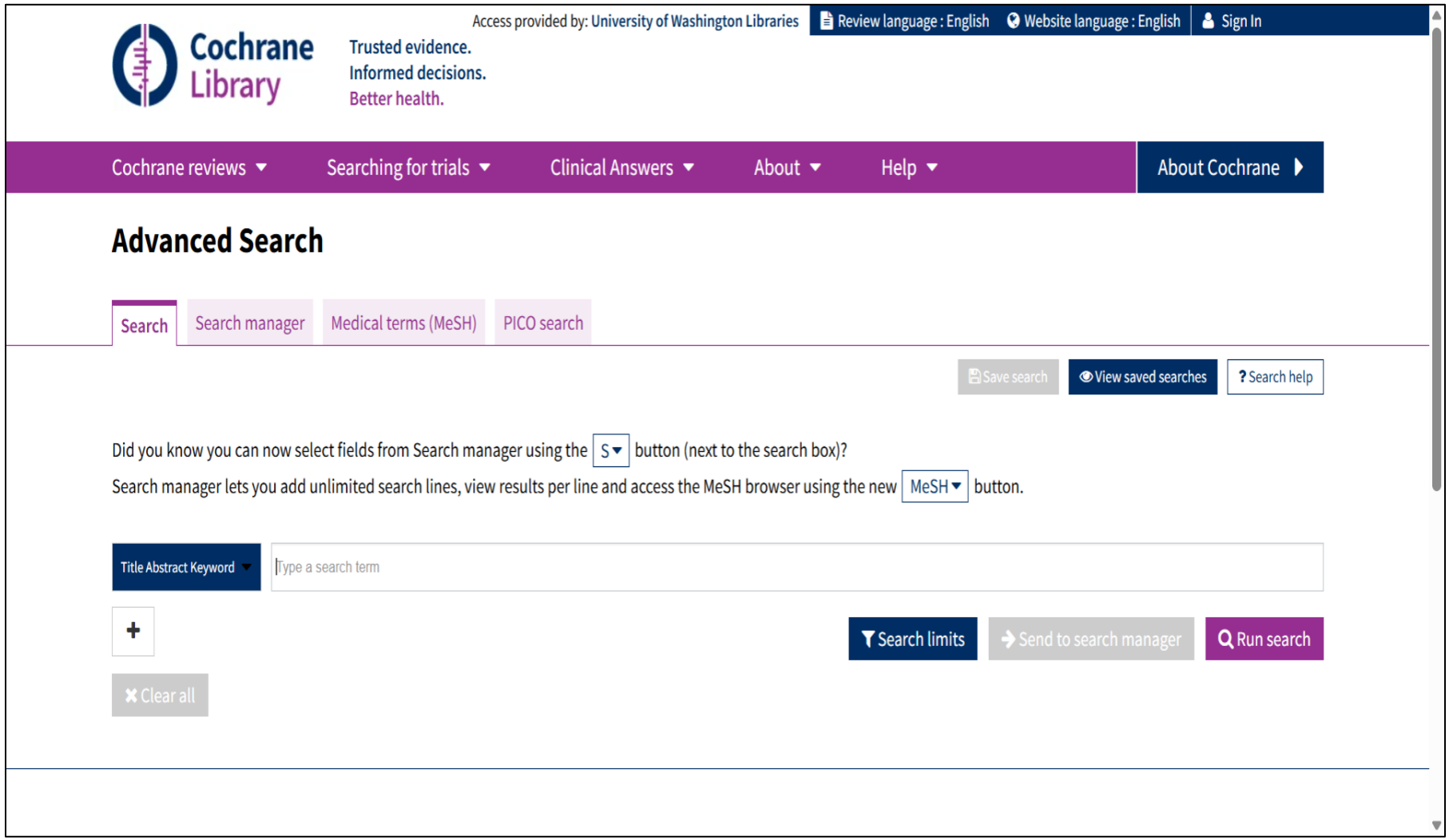

Figure 4: Cochrane Library Advanced Search page showing the search interface with Title Abstract Keyword dropdown selector, search text input field, and action buttons including Search Limits, Send to Search Manager, and Run Search.

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Code Recommendations and Technical Guidance

The following examples represent HTML-first solutions for five of the most impactful opportunity areas identified. These are starting points, not prescriptive implementations. Developers should test all changes with JAWS 2025, NVDA, and keyboard-only navigation before deployment, and may use alternative CSS or JavaScript approaches as long as the underlying accessibility outcomes are achieved.

1. Navigation Menus: Button Semantics with Expand/Collapse State

WCAG Reference: 4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A)

Current Implementation:

```
<!-- Navigation items coded as links in a list --> <li><a href="/cochrane-reviews">Cochrane reviews</a></li> <li><a
href="/searching-for-trials">Searching for trials</a></li> <!-- Dropdowns appear on hover/click but no state is communicated -
->
```

Recommended Implementation:

```
<!-- Replace anchor elements with buttons; add ARIA attributes --> <nav aria-label="Main navigation">   <ul>     <li>
<button type="button" aria-haspopup="true" aria-expanded="false"               aria-controls="menu-cochrane-reviews" id="btn-
cochrane-reviews">         Cochrane reviews       </button>       <ul id="menu-cochrane-reviews" role="menu" hidden>
<li role="menuitem"><a href="/cochrane-reviews/all">All reviews</a></li>         <li role="menuitem"><a href="/cochrane-
reviews/new">New reviews</a></li>       </ul>     </li>   </ul> </nav> <!-- JS: toggle aria-expanded true/false and hidden
attribute on Enter/Space -->
```

2. Search Results: ARIA Live Region and Focus Management

WCAG Reference: 4.1.3 Status Messages (AA) | 2.4.3 Focus Order (AA)

Current Implementation:

```
<!-- No live region; focus returns to top of page after search submit --> <!-- No status announcement when results load or
filters update -->
```

Recommended Implementation:

```
<!-- Add a live region near the top of the results area --> <div aria-live="polite" aria-atomic="true" class="visually-hidden"
id="search-status">   <!-- JS populates after results load: "Showing 71 Cochrane Reviews matching ovarian cancer." --> </div>
<script>   document.addEventListener('searchResultsLoaded', function(e) {     var status = document.getElementById('search-
```

```
status');     status.textContent = 'Showing ' + e.detail.count + ' results for ' + e.detail.query + '.';     var firstResult = document.querySelector('.result-card:first-child h3 a');     if (firstResult) firstResult.focus();   }); </script>  .visually-hidden {   position: absolute; width: 1px; height: 1px; margin: -1px;   padding: 0; overflow: hidden; clip: rect(0,0,0,0); border: 0; }
```

3. Search Result Type Tabs: Proper Tab Role and State

WCAG Reference: 4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A) | 1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)

Current Implementation:

```
<!-- Result type selectors coded as links in a list --> <ul>   <li><a href="/search?type=reviews">Cochrane Reviews 71</a></li> <li><a href="/search?type=protocols">Cochrane Protocols 12</a></li>   <li><a href="/search?type=trials">Trials 9414</a></li> </ul>
```

Recommended Implementation:

```
<!-- Tab list with proper ARIA roles and selected state --> <div role="tablist" aria-label="Result type">   <button role="tab" id="tab-reviews" aria-selected="true"           aria-controls="panel-reviews" tabindex="0">     Cochrane Reviews <span class="result-count">71</span>   </button>   <button role="tab" id="tab-protocols" aria-selected="false"           aria-controls="panel-protocols" tabindex="-1">     Cochrane Protocols <span class="result-count">12</span>   </button> </div> <div role="tabpanel" id="panel-reviews" aria-labelledby="tab-reviews">   <!-- Review results here --> </div> <!-- JS: update aria-selected and tabindex on tab activation -->
```

4. Summary of Findings Tables: Column and Row Header Markup

WCAG Reference: 1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)

Current Implementation:

```
<!-- Table uses <td> for all cells; no header elements; no scope attributes --> <table>   <tr>     <td>Outcomes</td> <td>Illustrative Comparative Risk</td>     <td>Relative Effect</td>     <td>No. of Participants</td>     <td>Quality of Evidence</td>     <td>Comments</td>   </tr> </table>
```

Recommended Implementation:

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```
<table>   <caption>Summary of findings: Screening for prostate cancer</caption>   <thead>     <tr>       <th
scope="col">Outcomes</th>       <th scope="col">Illustrative Comparative Risk</th>       <th scope="col">Relative Effect (95%
CI)</th>       <th scope="col">No. of Participants</th>       <th scope="col">Quality of Evidence (GRADE)</th>       <th
scope="col">Comments</th>     </tr>   </thead>   <tbody>     <tr>       <th scope="row">All-cause mortality</th>
<td>...</td>       <!-- Screen readers now announce column header with each cell value -->     </tr>   </tbody> </table>
```

5. Advanced Search: Visible Labels for Form Fields

WCAG Reference: 3.3.2 Labels or Instructions (A) | 1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)

Current Implementation:

```
<!-- Search input labeled only via title attribute (no visible label) --> <select title="Search filter options"
name="searchOptions" id="searchOptions0">   <option value="TitleAbstractKeyword">Title Abstract Keyword</option> </select>
<input title="Type a search term" type="text" name="searchText"        id="searchText0" placeholder="Type a search term" />
```

Recommended Implementation:

```
<div class="search-field-group">   <label for="searchOptions0" class="visually-hidden">Search field type</label>   <select
name="searchOptions" id="searchOptions0" aria-label="Search field type">     <option value="TitleAbstractKeyword">Title
Abstract Keyword</option>     <option value="Title">Title</option>     <option value="Abstract">Abstract</option>   </select>
<label for="searchText0" class="visually-hidden">Search term</label>   <input type="text" name="searchText" id="searchText0"
placeholder="Type a search term" aria-label="Search term" autocomplete="off" />    <button type="submit" id="runSearch">
<svg aria-hidden="true" focusable="false"><!-- search icon --></svg>     Run search   </button> </div>
```

These HTML code suggestions are recommendations and not guaranteed fixes. All changes should be thoroughly tested with assistive technology (screen readers, keyboard-only navigation) to confirm effectiveness before implementation. WCAG guidelines are designed to provide multiple paths to compliance. Developers may implement these improvements using alternative approaches with CSS and JavaScript, as long as the underlying accessibility principles are met.

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Final Thoughts and Recommendations

The Cochrane Library is a genuinely important platform - one that supports evidence-based healthcare decisions for clinicians, researchers, and policymakers worldwide. The content it hosts, peer-reviewed systematic reviews and meta-analyses synthesizing the best available health evidence, deserves to be accessible to everyone, including the significant portion of the medical and research community who rely on assistive technologies.

What stands out from this evaluation is that the platform has a solid structural foundation. The content within Cochrane Reviews is well organized, the PICO framework sections provide meaningful structured information, landmark regions are present and meaningful, and the skip-to-content link works. The opportunity areas identified in this report are primarily concentrated in the interaction layer - the controls, menus, and dynamic behaviors that sit on top of an otherwise well-structured content base.

Most of the barriers identified trace back to a manageable set of root causes: interactive controls coded as the wrong HTML element type, dynamic content updates without programmatic notification, and data tables lacking semantic header markup. These are systematic patterns, which means addressing them systematically will improve accessibility across the entire platform rather than requiring a page-by-page fix.

Recommended Fixes by Priority

Immediate Priority - Highest Impact

- Add ARIA live regions (aria-live="polite") to the search results container and filter results area so screen reader users receive confirmation when results load or update. This is a single addition that addresses the most frequently encountered barrier across the platform.
- Fix keyboard focus management after search submission and filter application so that focus moves to the first result or the status message rather than the top of the page.
- Resolve the search autocomplete keyboard trap so that Tab key navigation moves forward through the document rather than cycling back to the top of the page.

High Priority - Significant Impact

- Convert navigation menu items to buttons with aria-haspopup, aria-expanded, and aria-controls attributes. This addresses a persistent issue present on every page of the platform.
- Recode the search result type selectors (Cochrane Reviews, Protocols, Trials, etc.) as a proper tab list with role="tablist", role="tab", and aria-selected state.
- Add <th> elements and scope attributes to summary of findings tables and evidence tables on review article pages. Clinical evidence tables are the primary reason many researchers visit this platform.

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Important Priority - Enhanced Experience

- Add underline or other non-color visual indicator to in-text citation links throughout review articles to support users with color vision deficiencies (WCAG 1.4.1).
- Correct heading hierarchy on the homepage and on review article pages so that no heading levels are skipped.
- Add visible label elements to Advanced Search form fields to support users across all assistive technology configurations.
- Ensure modal dialogs (language selection, table viewer) receive keyboard focus when opened and return focus to the triggering element when closed.
- Mark decorative topic category illustrations with role="presentation" or aria-hidden="true" to reduce auditory noise for screen reader users.
- Add unique accessible names to each navigation landmark region so users can distinguish them during landmark navigation.

Complimentary Consultation Included

As part of this evaluation, Accessiblü's partnership with the LAA includes one hour of complimentary consulting with the team that conducted this evaluation. This session can be used to discuss implementation priorities, review technical approaches, or address questions about specific recommendations. To schedule this consultation, contact Jeff Rodgers directly at jeff@accessiblu.com.

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Disclaimer

Accessiblü prepared this report as a high-level accessibility evaluation of the Cochrane Library, accessed via the University of Washington's institutional library portal. The evaluation utilized industry-standard testing methodologies, including screen reader testing (JAWS 2025) on Windows 11 with Google Chrome, keyboard-only navigation, and automated scanning with axe DevTools for select WCAG 2.2 AA success criteria.

This report does not represent a comprehensive WCAG compliance audit and should not be considered a certification of accessibility compliance. While significant accessibility opportunity areas and usability barriers have been identified, this evaluation was limited in scope and may not encompass all accessibility issues present on the platform or across all use cases, browsers, or assistive technology combinations.

No Legal Liability:

Accessiblü offers this report for informational purposes only and assumes no legal responsibility for accessibility barriers or compliance failures resulting from its use. Organizations seeking formal certification of compliance should conduct a comprehensive audit inclusive of user testing with people with disabilities.

Limitations of Testing:

This evaluation was conducted in March 2026, and platform updates may have occurred after testing was completed. While automated tools and expert screen reader review were utilized, real-world users with disabilities determine the true measure of a platform's accessibility. User testing with participants who have a range of disabilities is recommended as a follow-up to this evaluation.

Pages were accessed through the University of Washington's institutional proxy (offcampus.lib.washington.edu). The proxy environment may affect certain dynamic behaviors and should be noted when comparing results to testing conducted in a direct-access environment.