



Code of conduct

For the prevention and eradication of sexual violence

January, 2026



Unité de santé
internationale
École de santé publique

Université 
de Montréal
et du monde.

Contents

<i>Our Commitments</i>	1
<i>Guiding Principles</i>	2
Our Shared Responsibilities	3
Individual Responsibilities	3
Managerial Responsibilities	3
Responsibilities of Organizational Leadership	3
Our Commitments to our Colleagues	4
Our Commitments to our Partners and the Communities We Serve	5
<i>Statement of Agreement</i>	6
<i>Appendix I—Reporting</i>	7
Reporting an Incident	7
How and When Should Concerns Be Flagged?	8
How Is Information from a Report or Declaration Handled?	8
Notes for Service Recipients	8
<i>Appendix II—Getting Help in Quebec</i>	9
<i>Appendix III—Definitions</i>	10

The International Health Unit (IHU) is a leading Francophone Canadian academic institution dedicated to offering expertise in international health, in view of contributing to the improvement of public health in developing and transitioning nations. Our mission is intrinsic to the respect for and promotion of gender equality, empowerment of partner organizations and respect for recipient populations and partners. The IHU must accordingly prevent and take all necessary measures to eradicate sexual violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse.

This Code of Conduct for the Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Violence builds on policies and guidelines adopted by the Université de Montréal (UdeM) that are aimed at the prevention and eradication of sexual violence in institutions of higher learning, and UdeM's policy for the prevention and eradication of sexual misconduct and violence, as well as Quebec's 2018 *Act to amend the Act respecting labour standards*. The Code draws on the model code of conduct proposed by the Comité québécois femmes et développement (CQFD), coordinated by the Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI). This Code of Conduct has been formulated according to internationally accepted norms and standards of the subject, permitting equal enforcement in all countries in which the IHU is present.

Our Commitments

The IHU is committed to instituting a policy of **zero tolerance** toward any form of sexual violence in all its activities.

We are committed to establishing a **work environment that is free of sexual violence** for the employees, interns, volunteers, partners and service recipients of our organizations and in countries of intervention.

We are committed to **protecting our program participants** and **the communities we serve** from sexual violence.

We are committed to enhancing knowledge and capacities with respect to a **survivor-focused approach** among IHU partners.

The desires and well-being of survivors—accompanied by the **best interest of the children** who are witnesses or survivors—remains a priority.

We are committed to receiving and processing complaints so as to ensure the **safety** and **confidentiality** of those concerned.

Finally, the IHU is committed to improving our collective ability to recognize and eliminate imbalances of power and inequality, by incorporating an **intersectional approach** (see definition in Appendix III). It may be difficult to explore inequalities of power when we navigate international legal standards, Canadian laws and the national legislation of countries in which we are present. We are committed to engaging in a dialogue with our partners on grounds for discrimination, as defined by Canadian legislation.

Guiding Principles

Sexual violence is rooted in **imbalances of power**. We apply an intersectional and integrated approach to the prevention of sexual violence.

Organizational culture seems to be a key factor in the problem of and solution to sexual violence. That is why we have decided to address the risks of sexual violence by engaging the project's employees, interns, partners, volunteers and other stakeholders on these issues.

"Zero tolerance" means that a failure to respond to sexual violence is unacceptable. Appropriate disciplinary measures will be taken following an investigation. Sexual violence may be a ground for dismissal. It is important to understand what sexual violence is (see Definitions in Appendix III).

The IHU focuses on **free, informed and continuous consent** in helping stakeholders better understand issues of sexual violence. Without consent, sexual activities are considered assault. A failure to say "No" is not equivalent to giving consent—and consent may be withdrawn at any moment. Furthermore, "consent" from someone who is impaired or has been threatened is not valid. Moreover, special attention should be given to authority relationships that may affect the ability to give consent.

In an investigation, we protect the rights of the complainant and the accused. We strive to be **factual** and **fair**, and we observe **confidentiality rules**. We recognize the importance of selecting skilled, qualified and experienced people, where appropriate, to conduct investigations. We maintain the independence of the investigative process and our support for the victim or survivor. We are also committed to informing survivors of the progress and outcome of their complaints.

We apply a **survivor-centred approach** by giving survivors control of the decision-making process following an incident and by establishing a nurturing environment in which their rights and choices are respected. The IHU is committed to mitigating the risks of revictimization to the extent possible.

We recognize that women and people living with multiple and intersecting factors are at greater risk of sexual violence and harassment, due to persisting **gender inequality** and **sexist stereotypes**. Furthermore, the application of an intersectional approach in enforcing this Code serves to help us recognize different vulnerability factors that may apply to certain individuals, and tailor the support process accordingly.

Our Shared Responsibilities

Individual Responsibilities

The IHU requires its employees, volunteers, interns, local staff, managers, Board members, subcontractors and all staff to:

- Become acquainted and comply with this Code of Conduct.
- Take all reasonable measures to ensure and maintain an environment free of sexual violence.
- Flag any concerns with respect to the risk or possibility of sexual violence.
- Report incidents of sexual violence and not take reprisals against complainants.
- Maintain the confidentiality of information on incidents of sexual violence and only share such information if required (that is, only with designated parties if intervention is absolutely necessary).

Managerial Responsibilities

Managers have a key role to play and assume these additional responsibilities:

- Ensure that interns, staff, consultants and subcontractors under their supervision are acquainted with, understand and comply with this Code of Conduct.
- Ensure that training or orientation on sexual violence is given, and that this Code is regularly updated.
- Give examples of appropriate behaviours to adopt.
- Ensure that contact information for one or more individuals in charge, along with organizations that can provide support, appears in project management handbooks.
- Take action when a concern is raised or an incident is reported using existing procedures (reporting to the authorities and/or an aid donor, if stipulated in the agreements).
- Protect individuals against reprisals.
- Apply appropriate disciplinary measures for failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.
- Handle each case so as to ensure confidentiality, impartiality and fairness.
- Establish, in conjunction with the IHU's affiliated institutions, recruitment procedures to prevent hiring those who have been found guilty of sexual assault or harassment, or have previously been punished for such offences.

Responsibilities of Organizational Leadership

The Management Committee must ensure that every effort is made to prevent sexual violence and that adequate response and detection measures are deployed out following their notification of an incident:

- Ensure that the organization has adequate human and financial resources to follow through on its commitments.
- Ensure the implementation of best practices in recruitment, orientation and onboarding in accordance with the Code of Conduct.
- Ensure that all interns, employees, managers, consultants and subcontractors understand, sign and comply with the Code of Conduct.
- Ensure that every partner organization signs this Code, or formulates or possesses its own policies

and procedures.

- Ensure that those who raise concerns or report incidents are protected against reprisals.
- Ensure adequate performance management to mitigate the risks of sexual violence, particularly by taking corrective measures when necessary.
- Annually revise the Code of Conduct and its implementation.

Our Commitments to our Colleagues

Within the Framework of your Contract with the International Health Unit, You Are Complying with Our Commitments When You:

- Treat all individuals with respect, without infringing on the rights of others.
- Discourage sexist, racist, heterosexist, discriminatory and similar jokes or remarks.
- Maintain the confidentiality of all persons involved in a complaint.
- Cooperate with investigations and the efforts deployed to resolve them.

Within the Framework of your Contract with the International Health Unit, the Following is Prohibited:

- Condescending or disrespectful behaviour, including derogatory remarks, emails and social media posts.
- Encouraging any form of sexual violence, including the sharing of sexually explicit material without consent.
- Encouraging the trivialization of sexual violence, as by failing to refute myths or stereotypes with respect to consent or assault, denying or making light of sexual violence, or suggesting survivors are responsible for having been attacked.

Within the Framework of your Contract with the International Health Unit, You Must Report:

- Unwanted, inappropriate or disrespectful sexual advances, as well as harassment.
- Abusive behaviours, perceived threats, intimidation, and verbal or physical abuse.
- Hostility to individuals based on race, religion, sex/gender, sexual identity, sexual orientation, disability or any other grounds of discrimination.
- Incidents of sexual violence or situations which put at risk the safety, security or well-being of staff members.

Our Commitments to our Partners and the Communities We Serve

Sexual violence is a serious obstacle to sustainable development and to meaningful participation by individuals—especially women. We are responsible for doing all in our power to prevent risks of sexual violence for our partners and the communities we serve, and for children in particular.

Within the Framework of your Contract with the International Health Unit, You Are Complying with our Commitments When You:

- Treat partners and members of the community with respect and dignity.
- Exercise special care in protecting children from sexual violence.
- Pay attention to the dynamics of power in our work relations.
- Instil a climate of confidence and recognizing partner strengths and contributions.
- Engage partners in a dialogue on sexual violence, by sharing best practices, lessons learned and tools, where possible.

Within the Framework of your Contract with The International Health Unit, It is Forbidden to:

- Obtain the services of sex workers at any time, regardless of your mission country's local or national laws.
- Have a romantic or sexual relationship with a partner's employee or with service recipients.
- Solicit sexual activities with children (those under age 18) and at-risk adults, whatever the local age of consent.
- Act in any manner that would suggest or imply that a sex act may be required as a condition for participating in the programs and services offered.
- Exchange money, work, lodging, goods or services for sexual services, including sexual favours, or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitive behaviour. This includes exchanges for services to which program participants are entitled.

Statement of Agreement

I hereby understand that I can make a significant contribution to mitigating the risk of and preventing sexual violence by effectively applying this Code of Conduct in my work.

I understand that I must comply with our collective commitments to our colleagues, partners and the communities we serve by observing the rules of behaviour set out in this Code of Conduct.

I, the undersigned, _____, hereby declare that I have read and understood this Code of Conduct and will comply with it.

I understand that violating any provision of this Code may result in disciplinary measures up to and including termination of the contract.

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

Appendix I—Reporting

Reporting an Incident

Please complete this form to report an incident anonymously:

[Reporting Form](#)

Otherwise, you can send an email to:

signalement@santeinternationale.ca

Reports will be handled in the strictest confidence whether submitted anonymously or by email.

We encourage you to provide your name when reporting an incident, but anonymous declarations will be treated with the same degree of importance.

All survivors are free to seek any outside remedies that they deem appropriate. This Code does not prevent a member from reporting sexual violence to the police or filing a complaint of sexual violence with the local criminal justice system.

When writing your email, please give the date, time, place and details of the incident, along with the names of those involved, as well as any witnesses.

Please also consider the following questions in writing your email:

- If you are the survivor: Are you still at risk? Do you fear reprisals?
- If you are a witness: Does the survivor know you are reporting the incident? Is the survivor still in danger? Are you at risk?
- If there are witnesses: Who are they? Can they be contacted? Are they at risk?
- Does the incident involve a minor?

Depending on the information received, it will be determined if an investigation is required. If the information is insufficient for opening an investigation, the complaint will be documented and kept confidential to respect the rights of those concerned, while leaving a documented record in the event of new reports.

How and When Should Concerns Be Flagged?

We encourage you to share your worries and concerns when you observe a risk factor, witness inappropriate behaviour or have suspicions about incidents of sexual violence.

Flagging your concerns:

1. Report inappropriate behaviour when it occurs only if this can be done in complete safety for the survivor and any witnesses.
2. Speak to your supervisor or a trusted co-worker, and follow-up by email, sending this person information on the incident (date, time, place and details of the incident, as well as the names of those involved and of any witnesses). You may also complete the [Reporting Form](#) or send an email to: signalement@santeinternationale.ca.

How Is Information from a Report or Declaration Handled?

Following the declaration of an incident, the resource person and/or managers are required to maintain its confidentiality, but must report to general management.

We will not share any information that could identify the survivor. The IHU must also inform any aid donors, management, partners, project field supervisors and the general public that an incident of sexual violence occurred, without providing information that could directly or indirectly contribute to identification of the survivors.

Note for Service Recipients

Because IHU project service recipients are unaware of this Code's existence, it is our shared responsibility to inform them of it. If workshops are conducted by IHU staff, notification must be given at the start of the session to advise service recipients of this Code's existence and its contents, as well as to share the contact information of a resource person if a report is filed. Furthermore, when training on SGBV (sexual and gender-based violence) is given, sexual harassment and this Code should be mentioned.

Appendix II—Getting Help in Quebec

Support will be available if you need help with respect to sexual violence. You can get this help without submitting an official report. If you need care or support that is not available on site, we can take the necessary measures or institute reasonable accommodations. The following resources to assist survivors of sexual violence are available in Quebec. Project management handbooks should identify locally available resources for our partners.

Bureau d'intervention en matière de harcèlement (BIMH)

One-stop-shop for anyone impacted by sexual harassment or violence at UdeM and HEC Montréal.

<https://harcelement.umontreal.ca/le-bureau/nous-joindre/>

Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel

Free help line and list of province-wide centres for sexual assault victims.

1-888-933-9007

<https://www.rqcalacs.qc.ca/the-calacs.php>

Guide de ressources LGBT+ (French only)

Search engine for finding province-wide resources. Keyword searches are used to find specific resources for sexual assault survivors.

<http://www.guidelgbt.org/>

Mouvement contre le viol et l'inceste (French only)

Provides bilingual support based on a feminist, multicultural approach. Bilingual hotline: 514-933-9007

<https://www.mcvicontreleviol.org/>

Refuge pour femmes autochtones de Montréal

Support and first-line services to First Nations, Inuit and Metis women to promote their autonomy and independence. 1-866-403-4688

<http://www.nwsm.info/contact>

Centre de santé et de consultation psychologique (CSCP)

Psychological assistance for students

514 343-6452

2101, boulevard Édouard-Montpetit, 2nd floor

<http://www.cscp.umontreal.ca>

Appendix III—Definitions

Sexual assault: “Sexual assault” is a legal expression and constitutes a criminal offence. The Supreme Court of Canada has stated that the act of sexual assault does not solely depend on contact with a particular part of the human body, but rather a sexual act which violates an individual’s sexual integrity. This include exposure to pornographic material, behaviour of a sexual nature or being filmed without consent having sex. (AQOCI)

Consent: Sexual activity is only legal if the parties consent to it. The Criminal Code of Canada defines consent at subsection 273.1(1), as “the voluntary agreement of the complainant to engage in the sexual activity in question.” The law emphasizes what the person thought and felt during the sexual activity. Sexual touching is only legal is the person has communicated their consent affirmatively, either through words or conduct. Silence or passivity is not synonymous with consent.

Sexual exploitation: Any abuse or attempt to abuse an individual in a vulnerable situation or with a power differential for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to financially, socially, or politically profiting from the sexual exploitation of another person. (Global Affairs Canada)

Sexual harassment is a term that is particularly used to describe a form of workplace discrimination involving conduct or a series of aggravating comments that the persons know or should reasonably know are inappropriate and which create a hostile or offensive atmosphere. Sexual harassment is characterized by all of the following three criteria:

1. Unwanted sexual behaviour (speech, gestures, threats, etc.), . . .
2. that occurs repeatedly (but a single alleged act may suffice if sufficiently serious), . . . and
3. that has adverse consequences on the survivor (physical, psychological, sexual or economic).

Examples of sexual harassment may include:

- Offensive remarks and jokes.
- Insinuations or teasing about an individual’s clothes, sex or sexual orientation.
- Unnecessary and unwanted physical contact, such as touching, patting, pinching or rubbing, hugging or brushing against someone, etc.
- Sexual advances.
- Displaying pornographic or other offensive materials of an explicit sexual nature.
- Unwanted and offensive communication by email, social media or telephone.

Intersectionality is a feminist theory, research methodology and point of support for any social justice action plan. Intersectionality starts with the premise that people experience multiple identities on many levels. These identities are based on social relationships, past life and power structures. People belong to more than one community at a time and can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege. For example, a woman may be a respected healthcare practitioner while being a victim of family violence at home. Intersectional analysis seeks to reveal these multiple identities, while exposing the different types

of discrimination and disadvantages resulting from these different identities. (Association for Women's Right in Development, AWID)

Sexual violence: Any sex act or attempt to obtain a sex act, any remark or advance of a sexual nature, any act aimed at trafficking or directed against a person's sexuality by constraint, committed by a person whatever his or her relationship with the victim, in any context, including, but without being limited to, at home and work. Sexual violence includes a range of acts, including sexual harassment. (World Health Organization)