



Dear friend,

In March, I had hoped to welcome many of you to the first National Conference on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). Unfortunately, we had to postpone the event in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the event was postponed, I am taking this opportunity to now introduce you to *Digna, the Canadian Centre for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) in International Cooperation*. This new PSEA accelerator for the Canadian humanitarian and development assistance sector is the result of a partnership between the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) and Global Affairs Canada.

Digna – the Latin word for “worthy” – is more than a resource centre powered by CCIC staff. It is a growing network of experienced professionals from both within and outside of our sector, collaborating to support and promote best practices within Canadian organizations to ensure that we are worthy of the trust given to us by Canadians, our partners and those who benefit from Canadian assistance. We have many plans for the coming years, but I wanted to focus, in this short note, on your needs in this critical moment of developing COVID-19 responses.

Experience from past pandemics and emergencies has shown that sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) is more prevalent during times of crisis. While we are all mobilizing to address the primary impacts of this emergency, it is equally important that we factor in and address the increased risk of SEA within our programs and take concrete actions to prevent it. I know that we are all struggling both personally and professionally at the moment. In this context, I want to recommend four easy actions your organization can take to continue making progress on best practices for PSEA even during this stressful time.

1. **Identify a focal point** within your organization for staff, volunteers and beneficiaries and link them to the Digna network. This does not have to be an expert on PSEA. Skills and resources exist in the wider sector and Digna will be there to provide support. What is important is to designate someone who can serve as that connecting link. Don't forget to send your organisational contact information to us at Digna.info@ccic.ca.
2. **Get your Code of Conduct out!** Out of the filing cabinet, off your website or from your head! Make sure that it explicitly forbids any kind of exploitative or abusive sexual behaviour. It should also include contact information for your focal point. If you do not have a current Code of Conduct, ACOCI has a [resource](#) that can help. Do not over complicate your code – the main point is to clearly state your expectations for staff, volunteers and partners.
3. **Circulate your Code of Conduct** to employees, volunteers, international partners (translated to local languages where possible) and to the general public through your website.
4. **Remind everyone often** about your organization's expectations to PSEA and share contact information for your focal point regularly. For example, consider having a standard opening slide for your Zoom or Teams meetings that highlights this information or a pop-up on your website.

We are in a time of change and crisis, and that brings new challenges. However, as noted by the Interagency Standing Committee responsible for the highest level of humanitarian coordination in the United Nations:

“As with any emergency, PSEA prevention and response should be a central part of coordinated humanitarian action. The crisis does not create new responsibilities; rather, PSEA actions during the COVID-19 pandemic should strengthen existing PSEA commitments to protect and assist people receiving humanitarian assistance.”

- Inter Agency Standing Committee, 2020

There are many other things you can do to PSEA in your programming. I know it can feel overwhelming to implement everything at once and I plan to walk you through the process in simple, bite size steps over the coming months. I encourage you to sign up for the Digna [mailing list](#).

You will also find more resources on our [website](#). I invite you to link to more than 40 expert members of the Digna Advisory Committee and Working Groups who are building synergy for our collective, sector wide commitment to protect our beneficiaries. To get involved, contact us at Digna.info@ccic.ca.

Digna is there to help you continue your journey on PSEA – wherever you are in that journey. I encourage you to watch for and participate in the coming events and activities of the Centre:

- Webinars:
 - Reducing the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse during crisis, May 6th, 2020, 12:30-1:30pm CDT. To register, follow this link bit.ly/Digna-MCIC.Engl
- Toolkit:
 - Digna will release its toolkit in May that provides you with examples and templates to improve your organization’s approach to PSEA

At Digna, we are here to support you. Please do not hesitate to contact us at Digna.info@ccic.ca. Together in collaboration in Canada and everywhere,

We can be worthy, we can be **Digna!**



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