



About us

Dense Breasts Canada (DBC) is a nonprofit made up of breast cancer survivors and healthcare professionals. DBC is dedicated to: 1. raising awareness about the risks of dense breasts and 2. advocating for breast density notification.

What are dense breasts?

All breasts contain glands and fat. A breast with more glands and little fat is considered a dense breast. Dense breasts are very common; about 40% of women over age 40 have dense breasts. There are four categories of breast density and breasts with over 50% dense tissue are considered dense.

Why it is important for women to know if they have dense breasts

1. For women with dense breasts, mammograms are less accurate. Dense breast tissue shows up as white on a mammogram and so does cancer, creating a masking effect. The accuracy of mammography declines as density increases; up to 50% of the cancers present in the densest breasts may be missed.
2. Dense breasts are an independent risk factor for breast cancer. The higher the density, the higher the risk of cancer. Cancer is 4-6 times more likely in women with the densest breasts than in women with the lowest density.

Cancer in women with dense breasts is often discovered by the woman herself when she feels a lump in between her scheduled mammograms. It is often in a later stage. As a result, women with dense breasts are more likely to need mastectomy and chemotherapy. Their prognosis is impacted by a late or missed diagnosis.

Patient access to breast density information in Ontario

Most women in Ontario do not know if they have dense breasts because they have not been informed.

Women with over 75% breast density (10% of women) Women in this highest category of density are notified and asked to return annually for a mammogram (instead of every 2 years).

Women with 50- 75% density (40% of women) Dense breasts are those with more than 50% dense tissue. Women in this category are not notified and put at risk because important information about their cancer risk is withheld from them. In January 2019, radiologists were asked to include ALL patient's breast density category in the report to the doctor but this is not uniform practice and doctors are unlikely to convey the information to the patient.

What women can do if they know they have dense breasts

They can have the chance to protect themselves from harm by:

- being vigilant practicing breast self-examination between screenings
- mitigating lifestyle risk factors (exercise, weight, alcohol use, etc.)
- understanding that a normal mammogram doesn't mean cancer is not present
- considering supplementary screening, such as ultrasound

What the Government of Ontario can do

The government can easily provide women with their density information by adding a simple line in the mammogram results letter with the density category and associated risks. A key part of early detection is ensuring women learn their breast density so that they can have a discussion with their doctor about their risk factors. The Government of Ontario can save women's lives by providing women with lifesaving information.

PROVINCE	WHERE BREAST DENSITY NOTIFICATION STANDS
British Columbia	Density notification implemented Oct. 15, 2018 for ALL categories of density.
Nova Scotia	Notification for ALL categories to begin FALL 2019 (commitment by Premier) Assessment software in place
New Brunswick	Notification for ALL categories to begin FALL 2019 (commitment by Premier)
Alberta	Commitment to notification for ALL categories. Mandatory reporting to doctor. Patient and physician brochures completed.
PEI	Commitment to notification for ALL categories (commitment by Premier)
Saskatchewan	Notification for >75% density category began NOV. 2018 Once system updated, all categories will be notified
Manitoba	Notification for >75% density category to begin in June Women with 50-75% density not informed (advocacy ongoing)
Quebec	Mandatory reporting to all GPs. Two meetings with Health Minister- she agrees women should be told.
Newfoundland	Will be replacing all mammography equipment and implementing density assessment software with goal of notification
Ontario	Notification FOR >75% density category began a long time ago Women with 50-75% density not informed (advocacy ongoing)

