



New report: Canada's breast cancer screening practices are failing women

Dense Breasts Canada calls for improvements to breast screening practices and launches new tool to help women get optimal screening

September 27, 2021- Toronto- A new report by Dense Breasts Canada provides insight into how outdated and inconsistent breast screening practices across Canada are resulting in confusion over how and when women should get screened, dismissal of women's concerns by healthcare practitioners, and tragic late diagnoses of breast cancer.

Failing Canadian Women: The Impacts of Outdated and Inconsistent Breast Screening Practices brings together the voices of women across Canada and the latest evidence in breast screening. 2,530 women made themselves heard when they completed a survey focused on their knowledge and experiences with breast screening.

Survey highlights:

- 43% of participants reported they were unaware of what age women can begin breast screening.
- 11% of women, aged 40-49, had a family doctor who would not complete a requisition for a mammogram.
- 30% of women who had a mammogram were not informed of their breast density, a significant risk factor in the development and detection of breast cancer.
- 34% of all respondents did not feel that discussions with their health care providers about breast screening were adequate for their needs.

A breast cancer diagnosis can be devastating. Each year in Canada, 27,100 women are diagnosed with breast cancer and 5,100 die. Nearly 40 per cent of breast cancer cases are expected to be diagnosed in females aged 30 to 59. Early detection can drastically improve outcomes and save lives. Breast screening programs vary considerably across the country, differing in the age screening begins, the ability for women in their 40s to self-refer for a mammogram, the frequency screening is performed, whether women are told their breast density, the availability of additional screening for women with dense breasts, and the age screening ends.

"With so many discrepancies in screening across the country, women are often unclear about breast screening options and best practices. We have unequal access and differing standards of care across the country. Finding breast cancer early should not depend on a woman's postal code," says Jennie Dale, Executive Director of Dense Breasts Canada. "Canada's breast screening practices are failing women. Our survey is filled with heartbreaking comments from women who found their cancer too late. Canada can and should do better to give women a fighting chance to find cancer as early as possible."

Dense Breasts Canada is calling for better screening practices across Canada, including more education and awareness for women and healthcare practitioners, annual screening for women over 40 and notification for all women of their breast density in their mammogram results.

Dense Breasts Canada, with support from women's health advocacy groups across Canada, has launched a new tool to help women navigate through the confusion. Mybreastscreening.ca aims to demystify screening for women and give them the knowledge and power to advocate for themselves and make informed decisions about their breast health. The tool incorporates women's geographical location, age, and history to provide local and evidence-based screening information.

"Given the importance of breast screening in early detection of breast cancer, providing the tools for women to advocate for themselves is essential, and mybreastscreening.ca does that," says Dr. Paula Gordon, a leading breast screening expert and medical advisor for Dense Breasts Canada. "We need to close the gap on information for women and their health care providers."

"Our report is an urgent call to action for both the federal and provincial governments to ensure that every Canadian woman has an equitable chance to detect breast cancer as early as possible," says Dale. "To everyone who wants to make an impact this October during Breast Cancer Awareness Month, check out our new tool mybreastscreening.ca, share it with your family and friends and contact your provincial and federal elected officials to ask for improvements to Canada's screening practices. Your actions will make a difference."

- For the full survey report, click [here](#)
- For additional comments from survey respondents, click [here](#)
- To access the tool, click mybreastscreening.ca
- For the PSA (TC # M1R33G4G-G/P/HD) click [here](#)

About Dense Breasts Canada (DBC)

Dense Breasts Canada (DBC) is a non-profit organization, founded in 2016. DBC is made up of breast cancer survivors and healthcare professionals dedicated to raising awareness about the risks associated with dense breasts and advocating for breast density notification and optimal breast cancer screening.

In the past three years, Dense Breasts Canada (DBC) has successfully advocated in six provinces that all women be directly told their breast density in their mammogram results letters. In five other provinces/territories, women with the highest density are now informed. As a result, hundreds of thousands of women in Canada have now been informed that they have dense breasts and can be proactive about their breast cancer risk. DBC has recognized the significant gaps and disparities in breast screening as shown by the women's voices in its survey report. Its mission has expanded to raise awareness and advocate for optimal and equitable breast screening practices for Canadian women so that every Canadian woman has a chance to detect breast cancer early.

Dense Breasts Canada and women's health advocates across Canada have teamed up to launch mybreastscreening.ca in order to educate and empower women when it comes to their breast screening. When women are empowered with accurate, current, and relevant information they can make the best decisions for their health.

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Key Stats and Facts:

- According to the Canadian Cancer Society, about 1 in 8 Canadian women will develop breast cancer during their lifetime and 1 in 33 will die from it.
- About 27,000 new cases of breast cancer were projected in 2020 and 5,100 deaths.
- On average, 75 Canadian women will be diagnosed with breast cancer every day.
- Nearly 40% of breast cancer cases are expected to be diagnosed in females aged 30 to 59.
- 17% of invasive breast cancers are diagnosed in women who are in their 40s.
- While experts agree that screening and early diagnosis lead to better cancer outcomes, women under 50 or from diverse ethnic backgrounds were often not actively targeted for historical research trials. Breast cancer screening, clinical trials, and research across the country need to ensure inclusivity so that science and medicine translate to better prognoses for marginalized patients.
- Only in 4 jurisdictions (BC, NS, PEI, YT) can women in their 40s book their own mammogram. Elsewhere, women must ask their physicians for a requisition and too many women are being unjustly denied this opportunity.
- In only 6 provinces (BC, AB, MB, NS, NB, PEI), women are informed about their breast density in their mammogram results letter.
- In only 6 jurisdictions (ON, SK, NL, PEI, YT, and NWT) are women with Category D density offered annual mammograms

Minority women are:

- 72% more likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer before age 50
- 58% more likely to be diagnosed with advanced stage cancer prior to age 50
- 127% more likely to die of breast cancer before age 50 compared to white women