Health.ministger@gov.ab.ca

**Email subject line: Call to Change Outdated Breast Screening Practices**

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you today about breast cancer screening practices in our province that are costing lives.

In Alberta, women in their 40’s are unable to self-refer for a mammogram. They cannot access a first screening mammogram unless they have a referral from their health care provider. Many women are being denied a referral even though Canadian breast screening guidelines state that it is a woman’s decision whether or not to have a mammogram. Other jurisdictions - namely British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Yukon - provide women with the option to self-refer. In Alberta and Northwest Territories, women can self-refer after the first screen in their 40's. Women should not be required to seek a referral for the first screening.

There is no scientific evidence that justifies starting screening women at age 50. 17% of breast cancers occur in women in their 40’s. 17.5% of deaths due to breast cancer are from women diagnosed in their 40’s. Cancer in this age group is more aggressive, which leads to increased mortality rates. Women in their 40’s who get mammograms have a 44% lower mortality rate from breast cancer than those who do not receive screening. It is imperative to detect cancer early. Therefore, women in Alberta need to be able to self-refer.

There are also racial disparities to be considered. Minority women have a higher risk of getting breast cancer earlier in life compared to Caucasian women. They also tend to be diagnosed with more aggressive cancers at an advanced stage, which increases mortality rates. To allow for early detection, they need to be able to have screening in their 40’s.

I ask that the women of Alberta be given the same opportunity as women in other provinces to self-refer and detect cancer early. Finding breast cancer early should not depend on where we live!

Sincerely,

[Name]