minhsc@leg.gov.mb.ca

**Email subject line: Breast screening in Manitoba needs to begin at age 40**

Dear Minister,

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

**Removing barriers - Self Referral**

In Manitoba, 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.

**Following expert recommendations - Access to screening at age 40**

Screening mammograms allow early detection of breast cancer. This reduces deaths from breast cancer and reduces the need for aggressive treatment and surgery. There is no scientific evidence that justifies starting screening women at age 50. Seventeen percent of breast cancers occur in women 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. A recent [study](https://mdpi-res.com/d_attachment/curroncol/curroncol-29-00444/article_deploy/curroncol-29-00444.pdf?version=1660037446)by Ottawa breast screening experts, in conjunction with Statistics Canada, found higher rates of advanced breast cancer in women diagnosed in the 40s and 50s in provinces that do not screen women in the 40s. It is imperative to detect cancer early. Therefore, women in Manitoba need to be able to self-refer.

**Basic recommendations on current evidence - Access for those at increased risk**

There are also racial disparities to be considered. Black, Asian and Hispanic 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 Manitoba 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]