



## **Canadian Government Moves Forward on Updating Breast Screening Guidelines**

**June 8, 2023 - Toronto** In a major shift in policy, the Canadian government announced today an expedited review of Canada's breast cancer screening guidelines. Federal Health Minister Jean-Yves Duclos announced that the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care would accelerate its update of the guidelines by more than a year. This follows a recommendation by the US Preventive Services Task Force to lower the breast screening age from 50 to 40, and significant pressure from Canadian breast cancer advocates. Currently in Canada, only 4 provinces allow women to self-refer for screening under the age of 50.

**The new Canadian guidelines will be released this fall, rather than in 2025 as originally planned.**

**"New guidelines that allow earlier screening will save women's lives," says Jennie Dale, Cofounder and Executive Director of Dense Breasts Canada, "We look forward to seeing progress for women in the forthcoming guidelines. Expediting these new guidelines is critically important. Thank you, Minister Duclos, for prioritizing women's health."**

The government announced a major shift by the Task Force to include multiple types of evidence and not solely Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) in formulating recommendations. Canadian breast cancer specialists have pointed out compromised randomization of the Canadian National Breast Screening Study used by the Task Force for decades. Recent research by Statistics Canada and University of Ottawa physicians Jean Seely and Anna Wilkinson, has shown that provinces where women are screened in their 40s have fewer cases of Stage 2, 3, and 4 cancers than those where women cannot have screening until age 50.

**Health Minister Jean Yves Duclos tweeted today, "With 12% of women in Canada expected to be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime, having breast cancer screening guidelines that are based on the latest science is essential."**

The government also announced that it would provide up to \$500 000 in additional funding to expedite the update of the breast cancer screening guideline. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/news/2023/06/government-of-canada-to-help-advance-work-on-breast-cancer-screening.html>

Patient advocacy group Dense Breasts Canada and the experts they collaborate with have been vocal critics of the 2018 breast screening guidelines. The current guidelines did not include input from breast cancer screening experts or use current evidence.

Dense Breast Canada's Dale said, "We are so delighted to hear that the Task Force will be using current evidence. We have been asking for this for years. We are thrilled to see them moving forward for better health outcomes for Canadian women."

About 17% of breast cancers occur between the ages of 40 and 49, and they are more aggressive than cancers in older women. Earlier detection of cancer reduces deaths and gives women options for less harsh treatment. Currently, in provinces where women cannot self-refer starting at age 40, women must obtain a requisition from a family doctor or nurse practitioner. But many women are refused a requisition because they misunderstand the current guideline.

Patient Adina Isenberg was one such patient and had a mammogram in the US, which detected her cancer. She stated, "Early detection at age 40 saved my life, and enabled me to have less-toxic treatment for breast cancer. I am grateful to Dr. Guylène Thériault, and her colleagues on the Canadian Task Force for Preventive Health Care, for expediting their process and prioritizing women's health."

Patient Advocate Shira Farber was also dismissed when she asked for a mammogram in her forties and experienced a later stage diagnosis. She stated: "I am confident that the government's announcement will contribute to saving the lives of women across Canada. Had my breast cancer been detected earlier, I would have suffered less and avoided the increased risk of recurrence and metastasis. I don't want other women to face similar obstacles and barriers to screening."

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#### **QUICK FACTS**

- 17% of breast cancers occur between the ages of 40 and 49
- Women who have mammograms in their 40s are 44% less likely to die than women who do not have mammograms
- Cancers are found smaller and/or at an earlier stage when found in a patient's forties. [Wilkinson et al. 2022, Stats Canada](#)
- Black women are 40% more likely to die than white women of breast cancer
- The peak incidence for breast cancer in Black, Asian, and Hispanic women is in their 40s; white women's peak incidence is in late 50s early 60s
- Modelling has shown about 400 avoidable deaths of women in their 40s each year due to the Task Force recommendation not to screen women between the ages of 40 and 49.

