



Ontario changes policy to mandate notification of breast density.

July 24, Toronto ON: In a shift in policy, the Government of Ontario has mandated that all patients who have a routine mammogram are notified of their breast density. Ontario joins six other provinces which have already moved to provide this information, in order to increase earlier detection of breast cancer.

There are four categories of breast density: A, B, C, and D, with categories C and D indicating dense breasts. Dense breasts are normal and common: over 40% of women over age 40 have them. There are estimated to be hundreds of thousands of women in Ontario with dense breasts, but – until now - the majority have never been told they have this breast cancer risk factor or the implications.

“We’re thrilled that the Ontario government is giving women the health information they need to be proactive about their own breast health and cancer risk,” said Jennie Dale, Co-founder and Executive Director of Dense Breasts Canada. “Now women in Ontario will have that chance to take action to improve their chance of early detection. We also hope to see the government offer additional screening, such as ultrasound, to women with dense breasts. Mammograms are not enough.”

Dense Breasts Canada’s medical advisor, Dr Paula Gordon stated, “Breast density is an important piece of health information, just like knowing one’s blood pressure or cholesterol level. It can prompt a woman to modify her lifestyle habits and seek out options for early detection that may one day save her life.”

[Dense breasts are a more prevalent risk factor than having a family history of breast cancer. Dense breasts pose two independent risks:](#)

1. They make it harder to detect cancer on a mammogram because dense tissue and cancerous tumours look the same in a screening.
2. They increase a woman’s risk of breast cancer.

In Ontario, [about 12000 women are diagnosed annually with breast cancer and 2000 women die every year.](#) The early detection of breast cancer can drastically reduce suffering and save lives, but remains a challenge for women with dense breasts, who are more likely to have breast cancer diagnosed in advanced stages.

Updated Ontario Health page on breast density for OBSP participants:

<https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/types-of-cancer/breast-cancer/screening/breast-density>

The updated page for Healthcare Providers: <https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/guidelines-advice/cancer-continuum/screening/breast-density-provider-information>

Additional information

- One in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in her lifetime
- Breast cancer is expected to be the [most diagnosed cancer in](#) Ontario women.
- Mammograms miss about 40-50% of cancers in women with category D density.
- Women in category D have a 4-6 times higher chance of getting breast cancer than women in category A.
- Ontario Health, based on guidance from the Ontario Health Technology Advisory Committee, has issued a draft recommendation for publicly funding supplemental screening as an adjunct to mammography for people with extremely dense breasts (Category D). <https://www.hqontario.ca/Portals/0/Documents/evidence/open-comment/recommendation-hta-supplemental-screening-as-an-adjunct-to-mammography-for-breast-cancer-screening-in-people-with-dense-breasts-draft-2303-en.pdf>
- Only [5% to 10% of women](#) with breast cancer have a family history of the disease.
- Dense breasts are breasts that have more glandular tissue than fat.
- Patient advocacy for density notification has led to Ontario becoming the 7th jurisdiction to inform women of their breast density category, following British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Manitoba, and Alberta. Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador are committed to begin breast density notification later in 2023.
- In the USA, the FDA has mandated that all women be informed of their breast density in 2024.
- Screening in Ontario begins at age 50 and woman can self-refer annually from age 50-74. Advocacy continues for lowering the screening age to 40, as was recently recommended in the US. Screening begins at age 40 in BC, YT, NS, and PEI.

Patients and breast cancer screening experts are available for interview.

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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, dedicated individuals and healthcare professionals committed to raising awareness about the risks associated with dense breasts and advocating for optimal breast cancer screening.