hlth.Minister@gov.bc.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**Email subject line: Call to Change Outdated Breast Screening Practices**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.

**Background**

In 1988, BC was the first province in Canada to offer screening mammography. From the outset, women were permitted to self-refer annually starting at 40.

On October 15, 2018, British Columbia became the first province to implement breast density notification, and allow insured supplemental screening with ultrasound for women with dense breasts.

These are efforts of which BC can be proud. But problems persist.

**Issue: As of 2015, women can no longer self-refer annually starting at 40, and those with dense breasts cannot easily access supplementary ultrasound screening**

Women can no longer self-refer annually at any age, unless they have a mother or sister with breast cancer. That may seem reasonable at first glance, but 85% of women who get breast cancer have no family history, so that means that the majority of future breast cancer patients would not have the same opportunity for early detection. It is established that annual screening finds cancers earlier than screening every two years, especially in younger women, whose cancers grow faster. Annual mammography saves more lives and also allows treatment with less aggressive therapy, which gives better quality of life to women with cancer.

Although women in British Columbia are now told that they may have supplemental ultrasound if they have dense breasts, very few locations in British Columbia offer it. If they don’t have ultrasound, cancer is often discovered when a woman feels a lump after a ‘normal’ mammogram. These are called interval cancers and they are frequently larger and more often already spread.

**What the Government of British Columbia can do**

The government must work to bring back annual screening mammography for all average-risk women, especially for pre-menopausal women whose cancers grow faster, and ensure that screening ultrasound is accessible for women with dense breasts.

Sincerely,

[Name] and postal code [address if you like]