**Email subject line: Call to Change Outdated Breast Screening Practices**

Email address: ministre@msss.gouv.qc.ca

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you to highlight two breast cancer screening practices in our province that are costing lives: barriers to breast cancer screening for women aged 40-49 and the withholding of breast density information from women. Quebec lags behind the other provinces (Op-Ed [here](https://montrealgazette.com/opinion/opinion-gaps-remain-in-quebecs-new-breast-screening-policy)).

**Women 40-49**

**Removing barriers - Self Referral**

In Quebec, women in their 40s are unable to self-refer for a mammogram. If they want a screening mammogram, they must 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. British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Yukon provide women with the option to self-refer at 40. In Alberta women can self-refer at 45 or after the first screening in their 40’s. New Brunswick will begin self-referral at 40 in early 2024 and Ontario will begin in the fall of 2024.

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

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 and more aggressive treatment and surgery. Women in their 40’s who get mammograms have a 44 percent lower mortality rate from breast cancer than those who do not receive screening. To detect cancer early, women in Quebec need to be able to self-refer.

**Follow 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 and reduces quality of life. For early detection, they need to be able to have screening in their 40’s.

**Breast Density**

Women in ON, BC, AB, MB, PEI, NS, YT, and NB are directly informed of their breast density in their mammogram letter, but not in Quebec. This leaves women with dense breasts in the dark. Dense breasts increase the risk of breast cancer and the risk that cancer will be hidden by dense tissue on a mammogram. Women are unaware of their risk and can have a false sense of security after a normal mammogram.

I ask that the women of Quebec be given the same opportunity as women in other provinces to detect cancer early by allowing for self-referral and informing women of their breast density.

Sincerely, [Name]