Lisa\_semmler@gov.nt.ca

Dear Minister,

**Email subject line: Call to Change Outdated Breast Screening Practices**

Dear Minister or MLA--------

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

In NWT, women aged 40-44 are unable to self-refer for their first mammogram. Self-referral begins at 45. Women cannot access their 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 at 40. Many women don’t even have a provider.

Six jurisdictions - British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Ontario, New Brunswick and Yukon - provide women with the option to self-refer. Newfoundland will begin self-referral at 40 March 2025. Manitoba and Saskatchewan are phasing in self-referral by the end of 2026. Women 40-44 in NWT should not be required to seek a referral for their first screen.

Seventeen percent of breast cancers occur in women in their 40’s. 17.5% of deaths due to breast cancer are from women diagnosed 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. It is imperative to detect cancer early. Therefore, women in NWT need to be able to self-refer at 40, not 45.

There are also racial disparities to be considered. Racialized 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 at 40.

I ask that the women of NWT be given the same opportunity as women in other provinces to self-refer at 40 and detect cancer early. Finding breast cancer early should not depend on where we live!

Sincerely,

[Name]