Date

Dear [insert],

I am writing to you today to request your consideration of breast density notification practices for the screening program, run by IWK Health. IWK states it is committed to early detection of breast cancer and yet breast density information, which can help with early detection, is not provided to the family doctor or patient. Following a mammogram, the agency withholds breast density information from women and doctors in Nova Scotia. Women need to be informed of their breast density because if they have dense breasts they face numerous risks. Breast density matters.

**Breast Density Risks**

1. Cancer is 4-6 times more likely in women with the densest breasts than women with the fattiest breasts.

2. In women with dense breasts, mammograms are less accurate and will miss 50% of the cancers present because both normal dense breast tissue and cancers show up as white on a mammogram.

3. Cancer is often advanced by the time it is discovered, in women with dense breasts. Survival is compromised by a late or missed diagnosis due to dense breasts.

4. A large study published last year concluded that breast density is the most significant of all the common risk factors for the development of breast cancer.

**Density information is given to family doctors in other provinces**

Breast density information is made available to doctors and women in other provinces/territories but is withheld from family doctors and women in Nova Scotia. There is no reasonable explanation for this.

**Women with the highest level of density are recalled for annual mammograms in other provinces**

Five other provinces have annual recall in place for women with the densest breasts. Nova Scotia does not have a recall protocol in place for these women, who in fact face the highest risk of cancer. It is not reasonable that women in Nova Scotia with dense breasts are being placed at additional risk.

**Nova Scotia is the only province with automated breast density assessment software**

In 2017, the Federal government awarded Densitas $565 000 to implement software in all Nova Scotia clinics to assess breast density, but IWK Heath still refuses to share this information with family doctors or women in Nova Scotia. It makes no sense to withhold lifesaving information that is collected.

I believe that with density notification and informed discussions between women and their doctors, early detection can be a reality for more women with dense breasts. **If women knew they had dense breasts, they could have the chance to protect themselves from harm by:**

* being vigilant practicing breast self-examination between screenings
* optimizing lifestyle risk factors (exercise, weight, alcohol use, etc.)
* understanding that a normal mammogram does not mean cancer is not present
* seeking supplementary screening, such as ultrasound

I urge you to mandate density notification to family doctors and women. In this way, you can ensure the commitment of this province to finding breast cancer early and saving lives.

Kind Regards,

Name:

Postal Code: