

# Dense Breasts Canada's Testimony to the Standing Committee on Health

December 6, 2023





Testimony presented virtually to committee Dec. 6, 2023:

I'm a breast cancer patient, and in 2016 I cofounded Dense Breasts Canada – a non profit raising awareness and advocating for optimal breast cancer screening. I've spoken with hundreds of breast cancer patients across Canada and its an honour to be here today to represent them.

I could spend hours telling you about the damage the current breast screening guidelines are doing. I could tell you about Jennifer and Carolyn, in the committee room tonight; both were diagnosed with later-stage breast cancer after not being given access to screening in their 40s because of the current guidelines. Instead of lumpectomy and radiation, they were subjected to aggressive treatment- mastectomy, chemotherapy, and lymph node dissection.

I could tell you how they both missed critical years of work, how their families worried they would lose them, how they worry now about metastases. I could tell you that they live with lingering pain and debilitating side effects, and I could tell you that the Task Force members who create these guidelines believe that all of these are acceptable costs for Jennifer and Carolyn to pay in the name of not screening.

I could also tell you that if Jennifer and Carolyn lived in BC, Nova Scotia, PEI, or the Yukon, they could have self referred for mammograms in their 40s and been spared much of what they've gone through. I could tell you that even though current research shows clear benefits to early detection, members of the Task Force don't believe that earlier screening results in better outcomes for enough women. Instead, they cling to the flawed findings of 40-60-year-old studies that have now been discredited.

I could tell you more but the one message I want to leave you with is that the current guidelines are harming Canadians and causing avoidable deaths. The very guidelines that everyone would expect to protect Canadians are doing the opposite. The Task Force is denying us the opportunity to access preventive healthcare that results in better outcomes. Their overstatement of harms and understatement of benefits is not based on modern science. Their paternalistic concerns of the anxiety caused by screening are not borne out by patient's lived experiences. Their insistence on shared decision making perpetuates power imbalances between doctor and patient. And, finally, the Task Force's dismissal of the impact of the guidelines on patients' quality of life is reductive at best and callous at worst.

Please bring Canada into the modern era by using relevant, current, and inclusive evidence. Don't allow a group of biased, non-subject matter experts to continue to destroy Canadian's lives by denying us healthcare. Thank you.

Jennie Dale