
Advancing Breast Cancer Screening in Canada

A Summary of Policy
Wins and Progress

June 2025

densebreastscanada.ca

dbc
DENSE BREASTS CANADA

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Who we are

Dense Breasts Canada (DBC) is a non-profit organization made up of dedicated individuals and healthcare professionals who are committed to raising awareness and advocating for optimal breast cancer screening.

Since its founding in 2016, DBC has emerged as a leading force in advocating for improved breast cancer screening policies and public awareness across the country. DBC has made significant strides in achieving policy changes that prioritize early detection and equitable access to breast cancer screening for all women.

Goals and Mission

1. To increase awareness among the public and healthcare professionals of the following: the risks associated with dense breasts and the importance of breast cancer screening, starting at age 40 and continuing past age 74.
2. To convince provincial breast screening programs to provide supplemental screening to women with dense breasts (Category C and D density).
3. To convince the federal government to suspend dangerous national breast screening guidelines and reform the guideline making processes used by the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care.

Why we are seeking change

Optimal and equitable breast screening saves lives. Every year in Canada, 30,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer and 5,500 lose their lives to it. We can—and must—do better to ensure every Canadian has the best chance of detecting cancer early, when it is most treatable.

Early detection dramatically improves outcomes and improves quality of life. When breast cancer is found at Stage 1, the five-year survival rate is 99.8%. At Stage 4, it drops to just 23%. Detecting cancer early can also reduce the need for aggressive treatments like chemotherapy, mastectomy, and lymph node removal, preserving both life and quality of life.

Optimal screening means:

- Annual screening starting at age 40
- Screening every 1–2 years from age 50 and continuing past 74 for women in good health
- Additional screening for women with dense breasts
- Screening with the most up to date technology

Equitable screening means: Every woman in Canada—regardless of where she lives—deserves the same opportunity to have breast cancer detected early.

Breast Density Notification: A Milestone for Women's Health in Canada

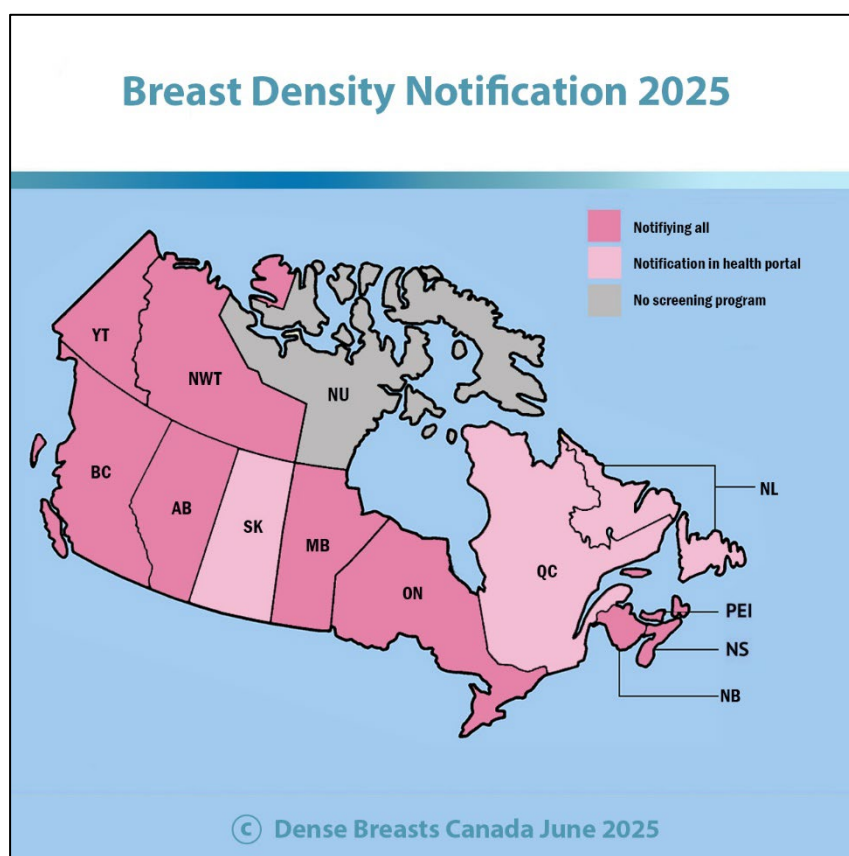
Before the launch of Dense Breasts Canada (DBC) in 2016, women undergoing screening mammograms in Canada were not informed about their breast density—a critical factor in both breast cancer risk and detection. As a result, women were left unaware of how dense breast tissue could affect their health outcomes.

Through years of advocacy and collaboration with healthcare providers and policymakers, DBC has driven significant change. Today, women across Canada, who are having a screening mammogram, are notified of their breast density category and its implications.

Currently, nine provinces and territories send women their breast density category by mail, along with an educational brochure. In Saskatchewan, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador, this information is accessible through each woman's online health portal.

Dense breast tissue not only increases the risk of breast cancer but also makes it harder to detect on a mammogram, potentially delaying diagnosis. With density notification now in place, women are empowered with essential information that enables more informed conversations with their healthcare providers. They can better understand their personal risk and consider supplemental screening options, such as ultrasound or MRI.

Breast density notification is more than a policy change—it's a critical step toward equitable, informed, and personalized breast cancer screening for all women in Canada.



Lowering the Screening Age to 40: Expanding Access to Early Detection

When DBC was founded, only four provinces and territories—British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Yukon—offered self-referral for mammograms starting at age 40. These regions had long recognized the importance of early access, allowing women to initiate screening without requiring a doctor's referral.

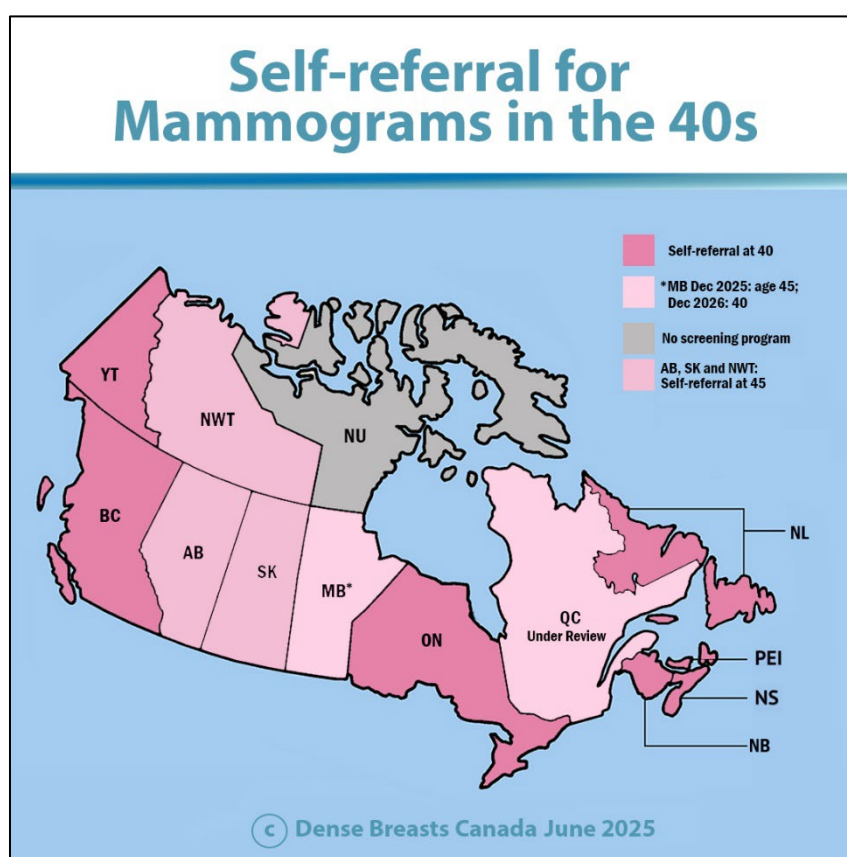
Recently, significant progress has been made. Three additional provinces—Ontario, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador—have now lowered the screening age to 40, enabling thousands more women to self-refer for mammograms.

Momentum continues to build. Saskatchewan will begin self-referral at age 45 on June 1, 2025, and expand to age 40 in December. Manitoba will begin at age 45 in December 2025, lowering to age 40 by December 2026. Quebec is currently reviewing its screening policy.

Lowering the screening age is a vital step in saving lives. Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in women in their 40s, and early detection significantly improves outcomes. Expanding access empowers women to take charge of their health and ensures a more equitable approach to breast cancer screening across Canada.

Advocating for Change: Expanding Access, Saving Lives

DBC has been a driving force behind recent policy shifts to expand access to breast cancer screening at 40. Working closely with medical experts and patient advocates, DBC presented modern evidence to provincial health ministries. DBC emphasized both the scientific evidence and the personal stories of women in their 40s affected by late diagnoses. DBC helped build a powerful case for self-referral and lowering of the screening age. This shift removes unnecessary barriers and empowers more women to take control of their health.



Advancing Access to Supplemental Screening for Women with Dense Breasts

Dense Breasts Canada (DBC) has made significant progress in addressing a long-overlooked gap in women's health: access to supplemental screening for those with dense breast tissue. Through persistent advocacy and public education, DBC has brought national attention to this important issue.

As a result, several provinces and territories—including British Columbia, Alberta, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, Quebec, and Ontario—now offer some degree of access to supplemental screening, such as ultrasound or MRI, for women with dense breasts. This progress is critical. Dense breast tissue can mask cancer on a mammogram, making it harder to detect. Supplemental screening increases the chance of identifying cancers earlier, when treatment is more effective and outcomes are better.

DBC's leadership has been instrumental in driving these changes, ensuring that women with dense breasts are not left behind and can access the comprehensive screening they need and deserve.

Supplemental Screening for Women with Dense Breasts in Canada

| Province | What is being offered |
|----------|--|
| BC | Ultrasound for Category C and D available with a requisition in some cities. Access began in 2018. |
| AB/NWT | Ultrasound for Category C and D available with a requisition. Screening program recommendation in 2022 for supplemental screening for Category D. |
| ON | Ultrasound for Category C with a requisition. Category D: ultrasound every year or MRI every 2 years can be requested. Requisition needed. Access depends on capacity. |
| SK | Ultrasound for Category C and D available with a requisition. |
| QC | Ultrasound for Category C and D available with a requisition. Official recommendation from screening program for Category D with family history. |
| YT/MB | No supplemental screening available. |
| PEI | Commitment for Category D made by Premier - yet to be implemented. |
| NB/NL | Access is not guaranteed. It may depend on the family doctor, medical history, location and woman's ability to self-advocate for herself. |
| NS | No supplemental screening allowed. |

Challenging the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care (Task Force)

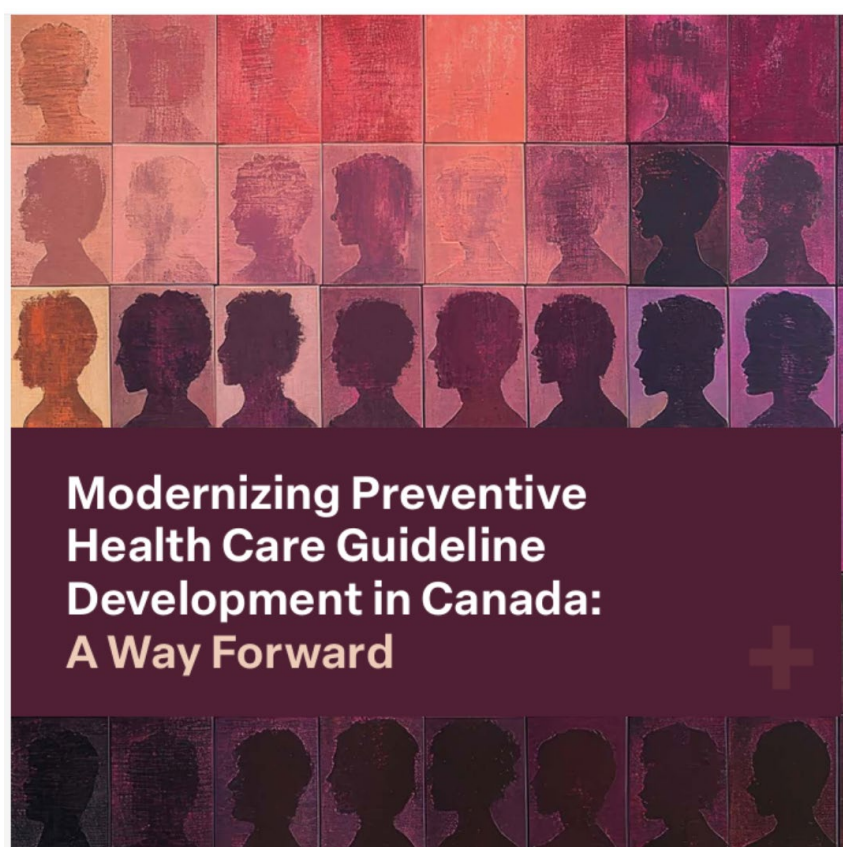
Dense Breasts Canada (DBC) has been a leading voice in challenging the national breast cancer screening guidelines issued by the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care.

Advancing Reform of the Task Force's Guideline Making Processes

DBC has actively engaged in high-level discussions with government officials and public health leaders. DBC met directly with Health Ministers and senior leadership at the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to advocate for modern, evidence-based, and equitable breast screening policies.

DBC has also testified before parliamentary committees—including the Health Committee and the Status of Women Committee—emphasizing the need for inclusive guidelines that reflect current science and the realities faced by Canadian women.

A key DBC focus has been reforming the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care's methodology and governance. DBC has consistently called for greater oversight, transparency, and the inclusion of experts in the development of national guidelines. This advocacy contributed to a major development: In June 2025, the external expert review panel published recommendations to reform the Task Force. We look forward to implementation. DBC remains a leading force in shaping the future of breast cancer screening in Canada.



Raising Public Awareness and Mobilizing Change

Raising Awareness

In addition to driving policy reform, DBC has made significant strides in raising public awareness about the importance of breast cancer screening. Through national education campaigns, social media outreach, and partnerships with medical experts, DBC has empowered women with the knowledge they need to advocate for their health and access the screening they deserve.

Building Public Support and Grassroots Momentum

DBC has mobilized public support for improved screening policies. By amplifying the voices of women across the country, DBC is creating a grassroots movement—one that continues to hold governments accountable and demand action for earlier and more equitable breast cancer detection. This growing momentum has inspired the launch of provincial advocacy and awareness groups—led by passionate volunteers—in Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and British Columbia, further strengthening the call for better breast health policies across the country.

Building Coalitions

DBC recognizes that concerns about the methodology and processes of the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care are shared across multiple medical specialties. Many of these fields have also been impacted by Task Force guidelines that are outdated, inconsistent with current evidence, or disconnected from clinical practice.

In response, DBC joined forces with healthcare professionals, researchers, and patient advocates to create The Coalition for Responsible Healthcare Guidelines.

([Responsiblehealthcareguidelines.ca](https://responsiblehealthcareguidelines.ca)) This national coalition is united by a shared mission: to ensure that Canadian healthcare policies are rooted in the best available scientific evidence and reflect real-world practice—always prioritizing the health and well-being of patients.

Continuing the Fight for Better Screening

DBC remains firmly committed to advancing science-based, inclusive screening policies that reflect the needs of Canadians. The chart on the next page shows the progress we've made—but also highlights the gaps that remain. With continued advocacy, collaboration, and public engagement, DBC will keep leading the charge to ensure every woman in Canada has access to optimal, equitable breast cancer screening—because early detection should never depend on your postal code.

Comparing Breast Screening Practices in Canada

Breast Screening Practices in Canada

| Province/ Territory | At age 40 can self-refer for a mammogram | Age 40 to 49 self-referral in progress | Breast density category mailed to all women having a screening mammogram | Annual mammogram for category D density | After age 74 can self-refer (others need req.) | Offer additional screening to women with dense breasts | Offer a high-risk program |
|------------------------|--|--|---|--|---|---|---------------------------------|
| BC | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | Yes | Hereditary High Risk Program |
| NS | Yes | | Yes | Yes | Yes | | Yes |
| PEI | Yes | | Yes | Yes | | | |
| YT | Yes | | Yes | Yes | Yes | | |
| AB | After 1st screen or age 45 | | Yes | | | Yes | In Progress |
| MB | | Age 45 Dec. 2025 | Yes | | Yes | | |
| NB | Yes | | Yes | | | | |
| SK | Age 45 | Age 40 Dec. 2025 | Online Portal | Yes | Yes | Yes | |
| ON | Yes | | Yes | Yes | | Yes | Yes |
| NL | Yes | | Online Portal | Yes | Yes | | |
| QC | | Under Review | Online Portal | | | Cat. D with Family History | |
| NWT | After 1st screen or age 45 | | Yes | Yes | | Yes | |

Support the Fight for Early Detection and Help DBC Continue its Work

For the past nine years, Dense Breasts Canada (DBC) has been at the forefront of advocating for equitable, science-based breast cancer screening policies. We are deeply grateful to the generous Canadians whose support has made this work possible—and with your help, we can continue to push forward.

Your donation directly supports DBC's mission to:

1. Lower the breast cancer screening age to 40.
2. Ensure access to mammography beyond age 74.
3. Raise awareness about breast density and improve access to supplemental screening.
4. Promote the adoption of advanced screening technologies.
5. Reform the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care and update national breast screening guidelines.

Thanks to community support, we've achieved major milestones: breast density notification is now in place nationwide, provinces are lowering the screening age, supplemental screening access is expanding, and the Task Force's guideline making process is under formal review. But there's still more to be done to achieve truly equitable and accessible screening across Canada.

DBC is entirely volunteer-run—we have no paid staff. However, we do incur costs for awareness campaigns, advocacy tools, website development and security, educational materials, and outreach efforts.

Every dollar you donate goes directly toward this critical work, and all donors receive a tax receipt immediately.

Help us ensure that every Canadian woman has the opportunity to detect breast cancer early—when it's most treatable.

Please consider donating. Click here <https://bcwomensfoundation.crowdchange.ca/1414>

To learn more, visit:

densebreastscanada.ca
mybreastscreening.ca

Thank you for standing with us.

Jennie Dale, Cofounder, Dense Breasts Canada.