

The Impact of Not Screening Women Ages 40-49 for Breast Cancer

Key Facts

- 952,000 women 40-49 in Ontario
- Screening detection rate is about 3/1000 therefore between 1,900 and 2,860 breast cancers per year in Ontario for this age group
- 17 % of breast cancers are found in women in their 40s
- Women in their 40s represent 27% of the life-years lost to breast cancer and have the most years of life to gain when screening is performed
- 80% of all breast cancers occur in women who do not have high risk status
- Not screening women 40-49 leads to 400 avoidable deaths in Canada – 160 in Ontario
- The five-year survival rate for stage 1 breast cancer is 99.8% compared to 23.2% for cancers diagnosed at stage 4
- Across Canada, women in their 40's are diagnosed with less stage 1 and more stage 2 and 3 breast cancer than women in their 50's

Fairness & Equity Considerations

- Black, Hispanic, and Asian women have a peak incidence of breast cancer in their 40s and are inadvertently discriminated
- Black women get more aggressive cancers and are 30-40% more likely to die, than white women
- There is no biological or scientific reason to wait for screening mammograms at age 50
- Guidelines also add to the barriers in accessing care faced by vulnerable and marginalized women, who also tend to have poorer treatment outcomes
- 4 provinces allow women aged 40-49 to self-refer – Ontario is lagging
- Earlier detection of breast cancer in women results in reduced breast cancer mortality and less aggressive therapy compared to women diagnosed at a later stage

Research Findings Supporting Annual Screening for Age 40-49 Women

- A new study led by University of Ottawa professors, Dr. Anna Wilkinson & Dr. Jean Seely in partnership with Statistics Canada used Canadian Cancer Registry to look at 55,490 Canadian women 40-59 diagnosed with breast cancer between 2010 and 2017
- They found that Canadian provinces that don't annually screen women aged 40-49 have higher proportions of advanced cancer in these women and in women 50-59 compared to provinces that do screen women 40-49
- There was more stage 2, 3 and 4 (incurable) breast cancer in women 40-49 and more stage 2 and 3 breast cancer in women 50-59 in provinces that didn't screen women in their 40s
- They also found that since the change in guidelines to recommend against screening in 2011, there was a significant increase of 10.3% of stage 4 (incurable) breast cancer in women in their 50s in provinces that did not continue screening women in their 40s
- 2014 Pan-Canadian study of mammography screening and mortality from breast cancer found a 40% mortality reduction for women aged 40-49
- Data on 2.8 screening participants from 7 of 12 screening programs in Canada

Quality of Life Considerations

- Less aggressive therapy if detected earlier, avoidable mastectomies, less to no chemo, and reduced ancillary surgeries
- Improved well-being for affected women and reduced economic impact on affected women and their families

OAR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Women 40-49 years of age who consent to breast screening should be permitted to self-refer annually and be overseen by the OBSP
2. Women 40-49 years of age should be informed, though a provincial campaign, that the choice to screen is theirs
3. Educational program aimed at family physicians recommending referral of women aged 40-49 for annual screening