

NEWS RELEASE

Ontario Breast Screening Program (OBSP) recognizes Breast Cancer Awareness Month with historic expansion to mammography referral process

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY, Wednesday, October 23, 2024 – In recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month—occurring every October—Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH) is joining local health care providers in advising eligible Ontarians about an important change to breast cancer screening eligibility.

Effective, Tuesday, October 8, the Ontario Breast Screening Program (OBSP) allows younger patients—aged 40 to 49—to self-refer for mammograms covered by OHIP without a doctor or nurse practitioner’s referral. Previously the age threshold for self-referral to the OBSP was 50. All patients 40-74, inclusive of women, men, Two-Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people with no clinical concerns or a personal history of breast cancer, are welcome to self-refer into the OBSP program.

With this new expansion, it’s estimated that an additional one million patients in Ontario can now opt to receive important screenings that are critical in the early detection and treatment of breast cancer.

The Canadian Cancer Society has projected that 30,500 Canadian women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in 2024, representing 25 per cent of all new cancer cases in women this year. Of the estimated 290 Canadian men who will be diagnosed with breast cancer in 2024, 60 will not survive. 5,500 Canadian women will not survive from breast cancer, which represents 13% of all cancer deaths in women in 2024. While breast cancer cases continue to rise, survival rates are also increasing due to earlier detection.

“Many medical advancements are continuing to be made in the field of cancer research; however, the most effective will always be early detection,” said Dr. Deljit Dhanoa, Department Chief, NHH Diagnostic Imaging Services. “Often with diagnoses, the earlier that we can detect the presence of cancer in a patient, the sooner treatment can begin and potentially increase their chances of survival. By lowering the age for breast cancer screenings, the OBSP is reinforcing the value and importance of early detection, which has the potential to save many lives.”

The Ontario Breast Screening Program (OBSP) now recommends that:

- Most people aged 40 to 74 who are eligible for the OBSP get screened either annually or biannually depending on a range of factors, including a patient’s breast density and a family history of breast cancer.
- People ages 30 to 69 who meet the high-risk OBSP eligibility criteria get checked once annually with both a mammogram and breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or screening breast ultrasound if MRI is not medically appropriate. A referral to a high-risk OBSP centre for genetic counselling is required beforehand.

- Individuals between 70 to 74 who are already in the high-risk OBSP get checked annually with a mammogram through the program.

Individuals under 40 and over 74, or patients with symptoms or a personal history of breast cancer, continue to require a physician or nurse practitioner referral for a mammogram. For those between 40 to 74, no referral is required, however mammogram screenings must occur 365 days apart—unless an individual has clinical symptoms—to be covered by OHIP.

“NHH’s Diagnostic Imaging (DI) Department is accredited by the Canadian Association of Radiologists (CAR), offering OBSP screening as well as being an OBSP assessment site,” said Ken Graham, Manager, Diagnostic Imaging. “We are staffed by a team of skilled radiologists, medical radiation technologists specialized in mammography, ultrasound technologists and a breast health clinical navigator, who use state-of-the-art-equipment—including our fully digital mammography units—to ensure patients have access to critical, potentially life-saving screenings and tests, right here in our community.”

Learn more about the Ontario Breast Screening Program by visiting <https://www.ontario.ca/page/breast-cancer-testing-and-prevention> or call 905-377-7795 to book an appointment with NHH’s OBS Prevention Centre.

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About Northumberland Hills Hospital – Located approximately 100 kilometres east of Toronto, NHH delivers a broad range of acute, post-acute, outpatient and diagnostic services. Acute services include emergency and intensive care, medical/surgical care, obstetrical care and palliative care. Post-acute specialty services (PASS) include restorative care and rehabilitation. Mental health care, cancer and supportive care, dialysis and other ambulatory care clinics are offered on an outpatient basis through partnerships with regional centres and nearby specialists. NHH offers a full range of diagnostic services, including magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computed tomography (CT) and mammography. The hospital serves the catchment area of west Northumberland County. A mixed urban and rural population of approximately 67,000 residents, west Northumberland comprises the Town of Cobourg, the Municipality of Port Hope, Alderville First Nation and the townships of Hamilton, Cramahe and Alnwick/Haldimand. NHH employs more than 850 people and relies on the additional support provided by physicians, midwives and volunteers. NHH is an active member of Ontario Health (East)—formerly the Central East Local Health Integration Network—and the Ontario Health Team of Northumberland. For more information, please visit nhh.ca or follow us on Facebook [@northumberlandhillshosp](https://www.facebook.com/northumberlandhillshosp), X/Twitter [@NorHillsHosp](https://twitter.com/NorHillsHosp), and LinkedIn [Northumberland Hills Hospital](https://www.linkedin.com/company/northumberland-hills-hospital).

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