

---

## NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release  
October 22, 2013

Provincial Health Services Authority

### **Canada's first provincial screening mammography program celebrates 25 years**

**Vancouver** – The BC Cancer Agency's Screening Mammography Program has made BC a leader in breast cancer survivorship for a quarter century.

The program was the first of its kind in Canada. Since its launch on July 18, 1988, program staff have performed more than 4.5 million mammograms and detected over 19,600 breast cancers.

The program has seen a 25 per cent reduction in deaths from breast cancer among women in the province who have regular screening mammograms.

Over the last 25 years, the Agency's screening mammography program has developed and advanced a number of initiatives in an effort to improve BC's breast health system:

- **Fast Track Referral System:** To help reduce the anxiety faced by women with an abnormal mammogram and provide timely care, the Screening Mammography Program introduced a voluntary "Fast Track Referral System" in 1999 – a province-wide program to reduce the time between an abnormal screen and diagnosis. Fast Track demonstrated that the median time between an abnormal screening report and first follow up imaging assessment could be reduced by one and half weeks. In 2010, Fast Track became the standard process for all women in the screening program.
- **Mobile Service:** First piloted in May 1990, the program's mobile service has helped to improve and increase access to screening for women in BC. The service now visits over 150 rural communities across the province. In 2012, 23 First Nations and rural communities in northern BC were added to the mobile schedule. Each year, the mobile service performs almost 10 per cent of the total number of screening mammograms in BC.

#### **Some Facts:**

- More than 62 per cent of the cancers found through the program are considered as early stage. Cancers caught in their earliest stage are generally smaller and have not yet spread to other parts of the body. This means that there are more treatment options available and a better chance for successful outcomes for those patients.
- Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer diagnosed in Canadian women. BC continues to have one of the lowest incidence of breast cancer in the country, and some of the best survival outcomes for those women who do get breast cancer, with a five-year relative survival rate of 88 per cent.

- The national target for screening mammography participation for 50-69 year old women is 70 per cent. In BC, the participation rate of women in the target population of 50 to 69 years of age increased until 2000, from which time it has remained steady ranging between 51 and 54 per cent annually. The BC Cancer Agency would like to see more women participating.

## Quotes

### **Terry Lake, Minister of Health**

“Twenty-five years of screening mammography is a proud milestone for the province and an opportunity to celebrate the BC Cancer Agency’s many accomplishments, as well as the collaboration between the health authorities and community partners that have worked with the Ministry of Health to promote and improve access to screening mammography throughout BC.”

### **Max Coppes, president, BC Cancer Agency**

“Through initiatives such as Provincial Breast Health Strategy, the BC Cancer Agency continues to collaborate with the Ministry of Health, regional health authorities, and community partners to improve the existing breast health system for women in BC. Even with the latest advances in the treatment of breast cancer, the best chance for survival is early detection through regular mammograms and I encourage women to share that message with their family and friends.”

### **Dr. Christine Wilson, medical director, Screening Mammography Program of BC, BC Cancer Agency**

“It is very important for women in the target population of 50 to 69 years of age to be proactive in getting screened regularly. Screening mammography sees what we can’t feel and I hope all eligible women will take advantage of the BC Cancer Agency screening mammography program so we can continue to detect breast cancer early, when treatment is most effective.”

### **Colleen O’Neil, patient**

“Screening mammography saved my life. My doctor advised me to go for regular mammograms, and it was after one of many routine visits that I was diagnosed with one of the most common breast cancers found in women. I had surgery in 2005 and have been cancer free for eight years now, grateful that my cancer was caught early. “

## More Facts

- The risk of developing breast cancer increases with age – over 80 per cent of new breast cancers diagnosed each year in BC are in women age 50 or older.
- Most women who develop breast cancer do not have a family history of the disease – 75 per cent of women diagnosed with breast cancer have no identifiable risk factors.
- In 2013, an estimated 3,100 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in British Columbia, and 600 will die from the disease.
- In 2012, 281,715 screening mammograms were performed in BC, and 1,264 breast cancers were reported (4.5 per 1,000 exams).
- The Screening Mammography Program has 38 fixed locations and three mobile services, serving more than 150 communities across BC, locations can be found at [www.screeningbc.ca/breast](http://www.screeningbc.ca/breast).
- Women between the ages 40 and 79 with a primary care provider can book an appointment for a free mammogram without a referral by calling 604-877-6187 or 1-800-663-9203.

## Learn More

For more information on the Screening Mammography Program, please visit [www.screeningbc.ca/breast](http://www.screeningbc.ca/breast).

**The BC Cancer Agency**, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, is committed to reducing the incidence of cancer, reducing the mortality from cancer, and improving the quality of life of those living with cancer. It provides a comprehensive cancer control program for the people of British Columbia by working with community partners to deliver a range of oncology services, including prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment, research, education, supportive care, rehabilitation and palliative care. For more information, visit [www.bccancer.ca](http://www.bccancer.ca).

-30-

For more information or to arrange an interview:

Media Contact: Kavitha Palanisamy  
Communications Officer  
BC Cancer Agency  
[Kavitha.Palanisamy@bccancer.bc.ca](mailto:Kavitha.Palanisamy@bccancer.bc.ca)  
604-675-8257  
Media pager: 604-871-5699

Lesley Pritchard  
Manager, Media Relations and Issues  
Management  
Provincial Health Services Authority  
[Lesley.Pritchard@phsa.ca](mailto:Lesley.Pritchard@phsa.ca)  
604-675-7472  
Media pager: 604-871-5699