



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
Senate - Community Affairs References Committee interim
report:

Inquiry into the growing evidence of an emerging tick-borne
disease that causes a Lyme-like illness for many Australian
patients

Introduction

The Australian Government has taken an interest in, and is concerned for, Australian patients who are sharing their stories about suffering with multiple chronic debilitating symptoms. The Government, through the Australian Government Department of Health, began engaging with patients and advocacy groups in early 2013 to discuss the concerns about Lyme borreliosis, also known as Lyme disease. Prof. Baggoley, established a short-term advisory committee (Chief Medical Officer's Advisory Committee on Lyme Disease in March 2013 [CACLD]) to consider the evidence for a *Borrelia* species causing illness in Australians, looking at diagnostic algorithms for borreliosis in Australians and treatments for borreliosis, awareness-raising and education, plus research into borreliosis.

Through regular communication and correspondence, the Government has gained a deeper appreciation and real concern for those Australians experiencing these chronic debilitating symptoms, which they associate with a tick bite. The Government remains engaged with the patient and medical community to continue to find, share and understand the evidence associated with this medical conundrum. The Government hopes our work with diagnostic pathology and research communities will result in answers and relief for patients and their families.

The inquiry into *Growing evidence of an emerging tick-borne disease that causes a Lyme-like illness for many Australian patients* conducted by the Senate - Community Affairs References Committee culminated in the Committee's interim report (the Report). The Report is an important document and the Government thanks the Committee and the various stakeholders for their valuable and thoughtful input to the Inquiry.

This response addresses the recommendations raised in the Report, and has been coordinated and prepared by the Department of Health.

Recommendations and Australian Government responses

Recommendation 1

4.52 The committee recommends that the Community Affairs References Committee continue its inquiry into this matter in the 45th Parliament.

This is a matter for the Senate. The Government, through the Australian Government Department of Health, welcomes the possible continuation of the inquiry into the forty-fifth Parliament to ensure affected patients, their families and their healthcare providers are supported while biomedical research continues and the medical profession develops further strategies to diagnose and treat the illness of the affected patients.

Recommendation 2

4.56 The committee recommends that the Department of Health further develop education and awareness strategies for:

- the public about the prevention of tick bites and seeking medical attention; and
- the medical profession about how to diagnose and treat classical Lyme disease acquired overseas and known tick-borne illnesses acquired in Australia.

The Government, through the Australian Government Department of Health, will augment the material on tick bite prevention and first aid it has already published¹ with regular review and revision in consultation with experts.

The Australian Guidelines for the diagnosis of overseas acquired Lyme disease/borreliosis are included on the NHMRC managed clinical portal. The guideline has also been published in *Communicable Diseases Intelligence* Vol 39 No. 4 December 2015².

The department will consider developing an additional guidance document focussing on treatment of classical Lyme disease in consultation with medical experts.

Recommendation 3

4.58 The committee recommends that the Chief Medical Officer continue to consult with the medical and patient communities through mechanisms such as the Clinical Advisory Committee on Lyme Disease, and for the Department of Health to continue to facilitate meetings with medical and patient representatives.

The Government, through the Australian Government Department of Health, will renew its engagement with the clinical reference group established by the Lyme Disease Association of Australia which works to join all the advocacy groups concerned about this chronic debilitating illness.

The department will also seek to participate in relevant medical education meetings and conferences to inform relevant sectors of the medical profession on progress being made in Australian research and where forums exist to encourage the exchange of ideas and information relevant to the medical profession and patients.

¹ <http://www.health.gov.au/lyme-disease#preventing-treating>

² <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cda-cdi3904d.htm>