

**Senate Community Affairs Committee**

**ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**HEALTH PORTFOLIO**

**Additional Estimates 2015 - 2016, 10 February 2016**

**Ref No:** SQ16-000223

**OUTCOME:** 9 - Biosecurity and Emergency Response

**Topic:** Lyme Disease

**Type of Question:** Written Question on Notice

**Senator:** Madigan, John

**Question:**

Lyme-like patients are routinely denied antibiotic treatment due to the erroneous view in the medical profession that the disease does not exist in Australia. Dr Lum's comment at Supplementary Estimates in October 2015 of "What we know about Lyme disease testing—classical Lyme disease testing, in Australia—is the prevalence of true classical Lyme disease in Australia, is low. In fact, it is probably zero.(p12)" aggravates this problem. There are many reasons why the tests fail to find classical Lyme disease in Australia that bear no relation to whether or not the patient is infected by *Borrelia* and suffers Lyme-like symptoms. Such use of language clouds the issues.

a) Why does the department persist in making such statements when it is widely understood that the tests are unreliable and that patients do not always mount an effective antibody anyway?

**Answer:**

- a) The Department of Health remains concerned about many Australians suffering a chronic debilitating illness which they associate with a tick bite. The Department has contracted the National Serology Reference Laboratory to evaluate the in vitro diagnostic devices used for the serological diagnosis of Lyme Disease. The results will be used to examine the performance characteristics of these currently used assays and hopefully resolve the question as to why test results from one patient can be positive in one laboratory and negative in another.