

**11 January 2018****MEDIA RELEASE**

## **Government ignored evidence of Lyme-like illness for over 20 years**

The medical authorities justify their failure to help sick patients based on the questionable assertion that there is no evidence of Lyme disease in Australia. But it is not that simple. Once a story gets beyond the headline 'there is no Lyme disease in Australia' the controversy about evidence is usually obscured by scientific jargon and authoritarian experts. The research conducted by Dr Michelle Wills, that has recently become available might change that.

The Department of Health's [response](#) to the [Senate inquiry](#) into 'The growing evidence of an emerging tick-borne disease that causes a Lyme like illness for many Australian patients' claims there is 'insufficient evidence' the illness is largely tick-borne. This is despite the inquiry receiving reams of information; thousands of pages of evidentiary data; empirical test results; personal testimonies of patients and their carers; Australian doctors with a 70% treatment success rate; and expert opinions from international doctors with considerable experience in treating Lyme-like illness.

The Lyme Disease Association of Australia's (LDAA) CEO Ms Sharon Whiteman said, 'If the government had an open mind about this controversy, they would consider the evidence presented to the Senate as sufficient to ensure sick Australians are not denied treatment. The standards of evidence imposed on this disease are unreasonable and used to obscure the real issue that people are sick and they need help.'

A year ago, the LDAA reported that key evidence from the 1995 thesis of Dr Michelle Wills, titled 'Lyme Borreliosis, the Australian Perspective' had been ignored by the Australian government for over 20 years. The LDAA in partnership with Dr Wills has recently made the [entire thesis](#) available online for the first time.

Most significantly, the thesis elaborates on findings previously [documented in 1991](#), regarding bacteria discovered in the gut contents of Australian ticks. The aim of the study was to look for Borrelia, a bacterium with numerous strains, some of which cause Lyme disease. At the time, Wills identified spirochaetes (a form of bacteria) that were "Borrelia-like."

However, a 1994 government-funded flawed study that was only looking for the American strain of Borrelia, subsequently reported that they had not found actual Borrelia spirochaetes. The government accepted this without considering there may be a different native species of the bacteria in Australia and did not provide further funding for additional research. Those who deny Lyme disease is in Australia have consistently used the 1994 study to support their "No Lyme here" stance ever since.

This is despite Wills' thesis detailing the validation of her discovery as Borrelia spirochaetes by US Lyme expert, Professor Alan Barbour. Prof Barbour's endorsement is crucial; he was one of the team who first identified, isolated and cultured the Borrelia strain causing American Lyme disease. Prof Barbour is currently a Prof of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics at the University of California. He is still recognised an international expert and has written two books on Lyme disease.

Further, the thesis noted that through additional testing at his laboratory, it was determined that the Australian Borrelia were more closely related to the European species causing Lyme, than the single American strain that the Department of Health has myopically focused on.

This finding was reinforced in later studies by Wills, that determined that the antibodies of patients with Lyme-like illness were most likely to react to the European Borrelia strains. Additionally, Wills provided a thorough analysis of the government-funded 1994 study, bringing its credibility into serious question.

While not enough to meet the government's harsh standards of evidence for an Australian species of Borrelia, Wills' thesis certainly raised serious questions. She made informed recommendations for additional research, warning it was "a matter of public health concern and deserves further detailed investigation." Unfortunately, her thesis was ignored, with devastating consequences for the patient community. Unfunded research has been misrepresented as a lack of evidence, compounded by the government's myopic focus on scientific evidence as prerequisite for patients to receive treatment in Australia.

In the last three years, [Murdoch University](#) has identified a new species of native Borrelia, in addition to new species of other bacteria related to those causing tick-borne illness overseas. In December 2017, another research group reported the discovery of an additional two Borrelia species. While work to confirm pathogenicity has yet to be completed, this research can certainly be considered complementary to Dr Wills' findings.

Ms Whiteman said, 'Patients with Lyme-like illness – and indeed, all Australians – have a right to expect thorough, unbiased analysis of public health issues, and prompt resulting action. We had high hopes the Senate Inquiry would lead to some responsible policy responses as the evidence presented by the patient community was compelling. The government's response was sadly more of the same - an unfunded lack of leadership in this controversial matter. There remains a growing cohort of Australians who are being denied treatment by the Australian public health system that can't define or diagnose their illness; ignores the detailed empirical data they hold; leaves them bearing the burden of proof and suffering a debilitating chronic illness.'

Very little research into this disease has been funded since ABC 7.30 reported on the Wills research in 1992. The video is available upon request.

The thesis is very detailed and technical in nature. A summary of the breakthrough information it contains and key points can be found [here](#).

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