



For Lyme Disease Awareness & Action

17 August 2015

MEDIA RELEASE

## Federal politicians support Lyme disease

Lyme Disease Association of Australia (LDAA) welcomes the Federal Member for Shortland - Jill Hall's motion to be moved in the House of Representatives Monday 17 August 2015. The motion supports recognition that Lyme disease is a devastating disease and also the development of a national plan to treat people living with the disease.

Gai Brodtmann Member for Canberra will also speak to the motion. Gai has been actively engaged with some of the Lyme patients in Canberra having received postcards during the LDAA's national May campaign. This has given her a glimpse of the challenges they face trying to get help from the health system.

The current situation is untenable. The Health Departments have long denied that Lyme disease exists here. However, it seems highly implausible that Australia would be the only continent on the globe without Lyme disease.

The newly released Murdoch University research<sup>1</sup> found Lyme-like pathogens in Australian ticks. Other published research has done the same. The systemic denial of Lyme-like disease in Australia arose from a 1994 government funded research project that failed to detect *Borrelia burgdorferi* in Australian ticks.<sup>2</sup> What is particularly confounding is that the study reported that some bacteria was found but it was dismissed and no further scientific inquiry was made.

The term Lyme-like is often used to avoid the debate being distracted by which species of the bacteria causes Lyme disease. Some antagonists assert that the only species that causes Lyme disease is *Borrelia burgdorferi* - the common North American strain originally identified in Lyme Connecticut USA. The more substantive issue is that the genus *Borrelia* has hundreds of species and many of them make people very sick. Additionally, it is highly likely there may be a uniquely Australian species, so research, pathology tests and health policy that focuses on a few foreign species may not address the cause of the illness in Australia.

Further, arguments about which microscopic species of the bacteria are causing illness in Australia are not sufficient cause to justify waiting for policy that ameliorates patient's suffering and that could prevent new cases from degenerating to a chronic and potentially fatal state.

Thousands of Australians are getting sick after being bitten by a tick and thousands more remain misdiagnosed in the Australian medical system. If the federal and state governments fail to see Lyme-like illness as a priority the stress on the health system will only increase.

"Australians with Lyme-like illness get better with internationally recognised Lyme treatment. Lyme-like disease should be recognised as an emerging infectious disease so Australian patients can receive compassionate and effective world's best practice acute and chronic disease support," President of LDAA Sharon Whiteman said.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.parasitesandvectors.com/content/8/1/345/abstract>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2271457/>

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Additional resources for media are available from the Lyme Disease Association of Australia's [website](http://www.lymedisease.org.au)  
[www.lymedisease.org.au/media](http://www.lymedisease.org.au/media)