

Please find a statement **from Australia's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Brendan Murphy:**

As the Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer, I am concerned about many Australians suffering from the symptoms of a chronic debilitating illness, which many associate with a tick bite; whose lives are in turmoil because their illness cannot be easily diagnosed and treated.

Some patients and their health care practitioners believe this debilitating illness is due to chronic Lyme disease. Unlike classical Lyme disease which is found endemically in North America, parts of Europe and parts of Asia; the concept of chronic Lyme disease is disputed by medical authorities around the world. Many Australian patients have not travelled overseas to endemic areas so the likelihood they have Lyme disease is very low. To date the organism that causes Lyme disease has not been found in Australia.

The Department of Health continues to look for Australian research evidence that may assist in determining the cause of the chronic debilitating illness that manifests as a constellation of non-specific symptoms, such as chronic fatigue, muscle spasms, sore muscles and joints, head ache and nerve palsies as well as problems with clear thinking and lapses in memory.

Research published by Professor Peter Irwin at Murdoch University in Perth describes new bacteria in ticks collected from animals in Australia. Whether these bacteria can cause chronic debilitating symptoms in humans is yet to be determined. The department is also aware of metagenomic research looking at potential microbiological connections between ticks and patients. This work is being conducted under the leadership of Professor Eddie Holmes from the Marie Bashir Institute.

In 2015 and 2016, the Australian Government Department of Health has engaged in two parliamentary inquiries which have considered Lyme disease. Reports from both the House of Representatives and the Senate have been received and the recommendations welcomed. Once tabled, the Government's responses will be available on the Australian Parliament's website at [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au).

The [Department of Health](http://www.health.gov.au) has made available numerous products about Lyme disease, research, diagnosis and the prevention of tick bites on its website at (<http://www.health.gov.au>)

Regardless of the diagnosis, Australians who are unwell and experiencing debilitating symptoms should continue to see their doctors and receive ongoing medical care as required. Important alternative diagnoses of chronic disease need to be considered and investigated by each patient's medical practitioner.

**Background:**

The Department of Health continues to:

- consult with members who made up the CMO's Clinical Advisory Committee on Lyme Disease (CACLD);
- check for progress made in research;
- work to evaluate diagnostic test results; and
- work to develop a diagnostic pathway with relevant stakeholders.

Further information is available on the [department's Lyme disease web page](http://www.health.gov.au) at (<http://www.health.gov.au>).