

## **Position Statement:**

### **Lyme disease in Australia**

Classical Lyme disease is an infectious disease that can be transmitted to humans if bitten by a tick carrying *Borrelia burgdorferi* sensu lato. In Australia, this organism has yet to be identified in Australian ticks or any another vector that could transmit disease to humans. It is for this reason that the Australian Government does not support the diagnosis of locally acquired Lyme disease in Australia.

Classical Lyme disease is found in high rates in endemic areas, mainly the north east of the USA, some areas of Europe including the UK and some parts of Asia. A person visiting a Lyme-endemic area may become infected with *Borrelia burgdorferi* sensu lato through a tick bite and subsequently develop classical Lyme disease. Overseas travellers to Lyme-endemic areas may return to their home country before becoming symptomatic and/or being diagnosed. In Australia, Lyme disease should be considered in patients presenting with a travel history to Lyme-endemic areas along with supporting symptoms and/or a known tick bite.

Tick bites are common in Australia and can sometimes lead to other infections such as rickettsial infections and Q fever. Therefore, care should be taken to avoid tick bites in the first instance and to safely remove ticks when a bite does occur.

Some Australians and healthcare providers believe that classical Lyme disease can be acquired from ticks in Australia, or that a form of 'chronic Lyme disease' exists. Globally, 'chronic Lyme disease' is a disputed diagnosis which lacks sufficient supporting evidence.

The Australian Government cannot support the diagnosis of locally acquired classical Lyme disease in Australia without the causative organism or a competent vector being identified in Australia. However, the Australian Government does recognise that a group of patients are experiencing debilitating symptom complexes that some patients attribute to ticks and is taking steps to address this issue.

Further research is required to increase our understanding of tick-borne illnesses in Australia and the cause of the debilitating symptom complexes. It is hoped that the National Health and Medical Research Council's \$3.0 million targeted call for research into debilitating symptom complexes attributed to ticks will encourage researchers to further investigate these complex issues.