

Australian to lead thalidomide suit

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An Australian woman born without arms and legs will lead a mass lawsuit against the German and British firms behind thalidomide, a sedative blamed for birth defects, lawyers said Saturday.

Lynette Rowe, who has been cared for around the clock by her parents since her birth in 1962, is to head a class action against German chemical firm Grunenthal, makers of [thalidomide](#), and British-based distributor Distillers.

The suit, to be lodged in Victoria's Supreme Court, will seek payouts for Australians not yet compensated for [birth defects](#) caused by the drug between 1958 and 1970, said leading law firm Slater and Gordon.

"There (are) a significant number of people affected by thalidomide who have never been compensated, or even had the psychological satisfaction of an explanation for the [physical abnormalities](#) they have lived with for 50 years," said lawyer Peter Gordon.

"The legal action we are taking is an attempt to address those issues."

The firm won a multi-million dollar suit for 45 thalidomide victims in Australia and New Zealand against Britain's Diageo last year and claims to have uncovered evidence that drug makers knew more about the dangers than they let on.

A predecessor company of Diageo bought Distillers in 1986.

"Grunenthal and [Distillers](#) treated Australia as a priority and ensured this country was flooded with thalidomide," said lawyer Michael Magazanik, who has just returned from a fact-finding mission to Europe.

"By the time investigators identified thalidomide as the cause of the skyrocketing rate of [birth](#) injuries, there were another eight million thalidomide tablets in warehouses around Australia, ready to be sent to doctors' surgeries and chemists," he added.

Up to 100 Australians are estimated to have never received compensation for thalidomide conditions, including Rowe, who -- if she wins her case -- stands to receive one of the biggest personal injury payouts in Australian history.

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