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media release

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

Land Council calls for an investigation

9 February 2010

Two senior leaders from the NSW Aboriginal Land Council have demanded the state Department of Health guarantee a "full and transparent investigation" into the recent death of a young Aboriginal man at the Dubbo Base Hospital.

Chairperson of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, Bev Manton and Councillor for the Central Region, Stephen Ryan issued the call earlier today, following the tragic death 10 days ago.

"The NSW Government must step in and promise a full and transparent investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Colin Nagy at the Dubbo Base Hospital a week ago," Ms Manton and Cr Ryan said.

Mr Nagy, aged 34, of Lightning Ridge, was admitted to the Dubbo Base Hospital in the early hours of January 28, suffering from a drug overdose. He died later that morning.

An anonymous whistleblower from the Dubbo Base Hospital subsequently wrote to the Dubbo Daily Liberal last week alleging the care Mr Nagy received was sub-standard, labelling a claim by health officials that Dubbo Hospital was simply "congested" as false.

"It is not accurate to describe the current situation at Dubbo Base Hospital as simply 'congestion'," the whistleblower wrote.

"An overdose patient who was on life support in the emergency department was to be transferred to Sydney because ICU beds at Dubbo Base Hospital were occupied by patients waiting to go to the ward.

"The overdose patient, who was finally able to be kept at Dubbo Base Hospital, died later that night.

"The six-bed emergency department short-stay unit had five ward patients either awaiting transfer to Sydney or a ward bed in Dubbo base.

"With three patients in the two-bed emergency department resuscitation bay, if there had been a serious car accident we would not have been able to care for the victims.

"This is not 'congestion', it is a bloody disaster."

Cr Manton said the death of Mr Nagy raised many questions that health officials needed to answer.

"Was his condition taken seriously enough? Did he get the best care possible? Did he get the

same care available to everyone else?

"It doesn't matter if a person is drunk or on drugs, they are entitled to the same level of care as all other Australians.

"We want to know what was done to help this young man. We don't want Colin Nagy's death to be just another statistic. We don't want his death to go unnoticed. And we want people to know - particularly Colin's family - that the NSW Aboriginal Land Council is aware we've lost another young man to drugs, and that we will be doing what we can to assist our people out of this spiral.

"We also want to put health authorities on notice that the NSW Aboriginal Land Council is looking beyond our core business of land claims. We have another role, and that's to help ensure the well-being of Aboriginal people in this state. So we're putting service providers on notice in this state - we're watching them."

Cr Ryan praised the whistleblower for having the courage to come forward, and urged the Daily Liberal to continue its investigation into the matter.

"I commend the hospital worker, and the Liberal, for campaigning on this issue," Cr Ryan said.

"It's a matter of enormous importance not just to my people, but to all people of this region.

"Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people in the bush have had to put up with sub standard health facilities for decades.

"It's time our health officials were held accountable, and it's time our health system was put back in local hands."

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