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Family, Legal Body Back Improved Communication After Custody Death

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The family of Lathan Brown, an Aboriginal man who died in custody at Macquarie Correctional Centre in Wellington, New South Wales (NSW), along with the NSW Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS), have endorsed coronial recommendations aimed at improving communication between Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) and families during an inmate's imminent death. The deputy state coroner's findings, released on August 7, 2025, highlighted critical gaps that left Brown's family arriving at the hospital ten minutes after his passing, as reported by *The Guardian*.

Lathan Brown, described as a warm and creative 27-year-old Wiradjuri man, died in hospital following his transfer from Macquarie Correctional Centre. The coroner's inquest revealed that poor communication protocols within CSNSW prevented Brown's family

from being with him in his final moments. Deputy State Coroner Derek Lee recommended that CSNSW amend its policies to mandate a senior officer to liaise closely with families when an inmate's death is likely, ensuring timely notifications. Michael Brown, Lathan's father, expressed profound grief, stating through the ALS that the family was devastated by the lost opportunity to be with Lathan, per *The Guardian*.

The ALS, the peak Indigenous legal body in NSW, praised the recommendation as a step toward accountability. ALS Coronial Advocate Hannah Donaldson told ABC News on August 7, 2025, that improved communication could prevent similar heartbreaks and enhance trust in the justice system. The coroner also contextualized Brown's death within the broader issue of Aboriginal over-representation in NSW prisons, noting that Indigenous inmates are 17 times more likely to die in custody than non-Indigenous inmates, according to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Critics, including Opposition justice spokesperson Kevin Anderson, argued that the Albanese Government's slow implementation of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) recommendations, only 64% fully implemented per a 2018 Deloitte report, has left systemic issues unaddressed. Anderson, speaking to Sky News on August 7, 2025, called for urgent reforms to reduce incarceration rates. CSNSW's existing Aboriginal death in custody policy, outlined in a July 2025 document, requires regional officers to notify families, but compliance remains inconsistent.

The Brown family and ALS continue to advocate for systemic changes to prevent further tragedies, emphasizing the need for enforceable protocols to protect families' rights during such crises.