



Jillian Skinner MP

Minister for Health

Minister for Medical Research

MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW ENDS DISCRIMINATORY AUTOPSY PRACTICES

In a move that finally brings NSW in line with other Australian states and territories, the loved ones of deceased people with HIV or Hepatitis C will no longer be prevented from viewing their bodies after autopsy.

The NSW Minister for Health, Jillian Skinner, personally championed the change, which she said is long overdue.

“It’s vitally important that all aspects of NSW’s response to the continuing challenge of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment should be best practice,” Mrs Skinner said.

“That said, best practice needs to be based on both proper medical and scientific considerations while also drawing on fundamental principles of non-discrimination.

“Best practice doesn’t stop simply because an individual who is HIV or Hepatitis C positive sadly dies.”

For many years it has been the practice in NSW not to fully reconstruct after post mortems the bodies of people who had HIV or Hepatitis C.

“The grieving families had their loved ones unreconstructed bodies returned in a sealed casket which they were unable to open,” Mrs Skinner said.

“This discriminatory practice not only failed to treat the deceased with the respect and dignity to which they were entitled, but it often left their partners, families and friends feeling justifiably robbed of the right to pay their last respects in an appropriate fashion.”

Mrs Skinner said she was pleased to announce that, following a review she commissioned, the practice had ceased. The bodies of HIV and Hepatitis C positive people are now reconstructed as is normal for other people who undergo post mortems in NSW.

“I am sorry it has taken NSW so long to come into line with other states and territories and I regret that previous governments failed to address this matter earlier,” Mrs Skinner said.

“I am particularly sorry for the unnecessary trauma and distress the past practice has caused grieving partners, family and friends,” she added.

ACON President Mark Orr and Chief Executive Officer Nicolas Parkhill commended the Minister for her work in seeing the practice changed.

“This outcome is a testament to a long history of activism and advocacy by many people and organisations,” the ACON leaders wrote in a letter to Mrs Skinner.

“However the Ministerial support you provided to finally remove the discriminatory and disrespectful practices that had blighted so many people’s experience of living with or being affected by HIV and Hepatitis C in NSW undoubtedly made a significant difference,” they said.

Mrs Skinner said she hopes to soon be in a position to announce details of NSW’s revised State Strategy for HIV/AIDS.

“The new strategy will be based on reasserting a leadership role for NSW and recognising that the challenges of HIV/AIDS continue to be serious and pressing,” the Minister said.