



**CORONERS COURT
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

Inquest:	Inquest into the death of Wen Liang ZHANG
Hearing dates:	13 July 2026
Date of findings:	13 July 2026
Place of findings:	Coroners Court of New South Wales, Lidcombe
Findings of:	Judge Kasey Pearce, Deputy State Coroner
Catchwords:	CORONIAL LAW – death in Corrective Services NSW custody – natural causes – whether care and treatment appropriate and reasonable
File number:	2025/00458068
Representation:	Danny Winter-Mirenzi, Advocate Assisting the Coroner G Amal on behalf of the Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network H Short of the Department of Communities and Justice, Legal, on behalf of the Commissioner of Corrective Services NSW
Non-publication order	A non-publication order has been made pursuant to section 74(1)(b) of the <i>Coroners Act 2009</i> (NSW) in relation to material contained within the brief of evidence. A copy of this order is on the Registry file.
Findings:	Wen Liang Zhang died on 25 November 2025 at the Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick, NSW 2031 The cause of Mr Zhang’s death was metastatic lung adenocarcinoma. Mr Zhang died of natural causes while in the lawful custody of Corrective Services New South Wales

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 At the time of his death Mr Zhang was a remand prisoner pending the finalisation of serious criminal charges. He had been first in the custody of the NSW Police Force (**NSWPF**) and then Corrective Services NSW (**CSNSW**) since his arrest on 26 September 2025.
- 1.2 Shortly after his arrest, NSWPF officers took Mr Zhang to Prince of Wales Hospital (**POWH**) for a medical assessment, where he was diagnosed with adenocarcinoma, which had metastasized to other parts of his body. Mr Zhang declined treatment for his cancer.
- 1.3 Mr Zhang remained at POWH until he was discharged on 29 October 2025 and transferred to Long Bay Hospital (**LBH**), part of the Long Bay Correctional Complex. The focus of his treatment after this point was on pain management.
- 1.4 On 20 November 2025, after a few days of apparent decline, Mr Zhang was returned to POWH. He was palliated until his death on 25 November 2025. He was 57 years old.
- 1.5 Although Mr Zhang had had very limited contact with his family since he left China more than 20 years prior to his death, they have not forgotten him. On behalf of the Coroners Court of NSW, I extend my condolences to Mr Zhang's family for their loss.

2 Why was an inquest held?

- 2.1 Under the Coroners Act 2009 (NSW) (**the Act**) a Coroner is responsible for investigating all reportable deaths. This investigation is conducted primarily so that a coroner can answer questions that are required to be answered pursuant to section 81 of the Act, namely, the identity of the person who died, when and where they died, and the cause and the manner of that person's death.
- 2.2 When a person is sentenced to a term of imprisonment or is refused bail pending the finalisation of criminal charges, they are lawfully detained in the custody of CSNSW until their sentence has been served or their charges finalised. By depriving a person of their liberty, CSNSW assumes responsibility for the care of that person as the person is unable to independently take steps to seek medical assistance or other care. The combined effect of sections 23 and 27 of the Act is that it is mandatory for a Senior Coroner to hold an inquest where a person dies while in lawful custody. In such cases the community has an expectation that the death will be properly and independently investigated to ensure that

CSNSW and Justice Health has cared for a person in custody in a reasonable and appropriate way. In this case, there is no suggestion that CSNSW and Justice Health cared for Mr Zhang in anything other than a reasonable and appropriate way.

3 Mr Zhang's life

- 3.1 While any inquest inevitably focuses on the circumstances of a death, it is important to recognise and acknowledge the life of the person the subject of the inquest in a brief and hopefully meaningful way, to appreciate what their life, and their loss, meant to those who knew and loved them.
- 3.2 Wen Liang Zhang was born on 7 July 1968 in The Peoples Republic of China. He spoke Cantonese but never became proficient in English.
- 3.3 Mr Zhang had a de facto partner in China, with whom he had three children, two daughters and a son. His parents are deceased and his de facto wife and children remain in China. It seems that Mr Zhang had limited contact with his family after his arrival in Australia.
- 3.4 Mr Zhang had trained as a traditional musician in China and was a highly accomplished pianist. In correspondence provided to the court, Mr Zhang's daughter, Shuhui Zhang, recalls that her father was a local singer and that he would play the guitar and sing for his family and take his son for rides on his motorcycle.
- 3.5 The circumstances of Mr Zhang's arrival in Australia are unclear. NSWPF record an incident in September 2003 where the Department of Immigration located Mr Zhang working in a restaurant in Beverly Hills NSW. He was apparently classed as an unlawful non-citizen, was processed by the Department of Immigration, ultimately granted a visa, and remained in Australia.
- 3.6 It appears that Mr Zhang had limited social contacts in Australia. Since about 2014 Mr Zhang had lived alone at 22/49-61 Burton St, Darlinghurst. Prior to being remanded in custody, Mr Zhang was in receipt of a Disability Support Pension.

4 Mr Zhang's time in CSNSW custody

- 4.1 It is alleged that on 26 September 2025 Mr Zhang stabbed a general practitioner after a consultation at a medical centre in Darlinghurst. He was arrested near the scene and taken by police to the Emergency Department of the POWH due to complaints of chest pain and

police concerns in relation to his mental health.

- 4.2 While at the hospital a lung biopsy was performed which returned a histopathology of adenocarcinoma consistent with origin in the lungs.
- 4.3 Mr Zhang was charged with Wound Person with intent to Cause Grievous Bodily Harm. On 29 September 2025 he was refused bail at a bedside court hearing and was remanded in custody to appear at the Downing Centre Local Court on 27 November 2025. Mr Zhang remained in POWH, although at 2:00pm on 30 September, responsibility for his ongoing detention was transferred from police to CSNSW.
- 4.1 On 29 October 2025 Mr Zhang was released from POWH and transported to the Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre (**MRRC**), from which he was transferred to Long Bay Hospital (**LBH**) to be managed in the Medical Subacute Unit (**MSU**). He remained in the MSU until he was returned to POWH on 20 November 2025, where he remained until his death on 25 November 2025.

5 Mr Zhang's medical history

- 5.1 Mr Zhang had a history of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression. He had a documented history of schizophrenia since 2014.
- 5.2 On 4 May 2015 police attended after Mr Zhang was reported to be hitting his head deliberately against a phone and phone booth at Centrelink in Darlinghurst. He was prevented from attempting to run in front of traffic by attending ambulance officers. Police took Mr Zhang to hospital as a mentally ill person. The notes of his admission to St Vincent's Hospital (**SVH**) record Mr Zhang admitting to stomach aches from alcoholism and to generally consuming 1 longneck of beer (2-3 standard drinks) every 4-5 hours. Mr Zhang's medical records were marked with his underlying presenting problem as *psychosis*. He was discharged from hospital on 6 May 2015.
- 5.3 On 19 January 2017 Mr Zhang was again admitted to SVH for psychosis from Foster House, a residential facility in Surry Hills for men facing homelessness. Medical records indicate that he presented with *a background of PTSD, anxiety and depression...and was non-compliant with his olanzapine (an anti-psychotic)*. He is recorded as experiencing psychotic symptoms. Mr Zhang was admitted to the Caritas Unit, a dedicated mental health ward, on 20 January 2017 where he improved over the course of a 6-day admission. He was granted

leave and is recorded as having used ice (methamphetamine) while on leave, resulting in a return of psychotic symptoms. Thereafter he was not permitted to leave the unit until symptoms subsided. Mr Zhang was discharged on 9 February 2017, with a prescription for medication and follow up organised from community mental health services.

- 5.4 In September 2025 after Mr Zhang was arrested and brought by police to POWH, he was diagnosed with a right upper lobe adenocarcinoma and bony metastases to his thoracic and lumbar spine and pathological fractures of the right acetabulum and adrenal metastases. He consented to procedures needed for diagnostic purposes but declined to have chemotherapy and radiotherapy.
- 5.5 Mr Zhang was referred to the palliative care team for guidance on pain management. He was prescribed oxycodone daily and was recorded as declining radiation treatment for his cancer diagnosis. He was also noted as having *muscle wasting and de-conditioning with generalised weakness and pain limiting movement. Fluctuating mobility.*
- 5.6 After his discharge from POWH on 29 October, Mr Zhang was transferred from POWH to LBH, having been refused bail. The spread of Mr Zhang's cancer caused him considerable pain as well as trouble with walking. While in custody, he required a walker to mobilise. He was also on a high dose of medication to manage his schizophrenia.

6 Events preceding Mr Zhang's death

- 6.1 On 20 November 2025 Mr Zhang was brought by ambulance to POWH with shortness of breath and fever. Over the previous 2-3 days he had experienced worsening shortness of breath, fevers and pain. He was admitted to the oncology unit for treatment. Initially the radiographer in POWH acted as a Cantonese interpreter. Mr Zhang consented to treatment of a chest infection but understood that doctors were considering differentials that included sepsis, pulmonary thromboembolism and abdominal obstruction. Another differential considered was neuroleptic malignant syndrome.
- 6.2 Mr Zhang received antibiotics, analgesics and fluids. He refused a computed tomography (CT) scan. In the following hours, Mr Zhang was agitated and the treating teams believed he was delirious. Despite antibiotic treatment, Mr Zhang's condition continued to deteriorate. Based on Mr Zhang's medical history of a metastatic malignancy and refusal of treatment and investigations, on 21 November it was determined that he be palliated. Dr

Krzywicki recorded the following in Mr Zhang's medical records:

The treatment for this type of lung cancer is chemo +/- immunotherapy with a relatively low rate of response. In view of the potential side effects, palliative intent and patient's refusal, we concurred with the patient's request and did not seek to enforce treatment against his will. In Cantonese, he expressed that he was ready to die...I spoke to Dr Thientosapol and expressed my thinking that the primary goal should be to make Mr Zhang as comfortable as possible.

- 6.3 Mr Zhang continued to receive pain medication until the morning of 25 November 2025. A nursing progress note records that between 11:15 and 11:20am two nurses were giving Mr Zhang a bed bath and that he was being rolled to the side for a sheet change and was rolled back onto his back. At that point he appeared to not be breathing. He took a breath 10 seconds later, then took 2-3 breaths approximately 20 seconds apart and then stopped breathing. Nursing staff paged the Resident Medical Officer, Dr Patrick Coelho.
- 6.4 At 11:42am on 25 November 2025, Dr Coelho certified Mr Zhang as deceased.

7 Investigations after Mr Zhang's death

- 7.1 As Mr Zhang was in CSNSW custody, during his hospital admission, he had been guarded by two CSNSW officers for the duration of his time at POWH. Corrective Officer (**CO**) Dickinson informed his supervisor of Mr Zhang's death at 12:28pm and was instructed to activate his body worn camera (**BWC**) until the arrival of NSWPF officers.
- 7.2 NSWPF Constables Ruggiero and Royan arrived at POWH at 12:44 pm on 25 November. The Officer in Charge (**OIC**), Senior Constable Jackson Towns, arrived about 1:54pm.
- 7.3 No Closed-Circuit Television footage exists of the area outside Mr Zhang's room in the Oncology Unit of POWH. However, the OIC concluded that there were no suspicious circumstances, evidence of any act of negligence, or any unusual circumstances associated with Mr Zhang's death.

8 The postmortem examination

- 8.1 On 8 December 2025 Forensic Pathologist Dr Lena Quinto conducted an external postmortem examination. She described Mr Zhang's body as cachectic and frail appearing. A postmortem CT scan, as reported by a specialist radiologist, corroborated Mr Zhang's

medical history. There were numerous metastases to bone with pathological fractures throughout the bony skeleton. There was a malignant lesion in the right lung with the appearance of spread to the left lung, as well as metastases to the adrenal glands.

- 8.2 Dr Quinto recommended that the cause of Mr Zhang's death be recorded as metastatic lung adenocarcinoma.

9 Investigations after Mr Zhang's death

- 9.1 CSNSW Senior Investigator, Jamie Paras, investigated Mr Zhang's death. Because Mr Zhang had been in custody for only a limited time, his Case Management File (**CMF**) and Offender Integrated Management System (**OIMS**) case notes contained virtually no information to review.
- 9.2 Section 1.2 of Custodial Operations and Procedures (**COPP**) 13.9 *Video Evidence* which deals with mandatory recording requirements, provides an exception for BWC being activated on a medical escort for a death in custody. Whilst it is noted CO Dickinson activated his BWC after Mr Zhang's death only for the purposes of recording crime scene preservation, this action remains in breach of COPP 13.9.
- 9.3 The Senior Investigator concluded that Mr Zhang was suffering from a medical condition for which he received appropriate care, and with the exception of the above breach of COPP 13.9, that the overall management of Mr Zhang by CSNSW during his incarceration up to and including his death on 25 November 2025 complied with Departmental policies and procedures.

10 Consideration

- 10.1 An inquest is mandatory because Mr Zhang died while in the custody of CSNSW. However, unlike most other inquests, no issues apart from the statutory requirements pursuant to section 81 of the Act were identified from the coronial investigation which required discrete examination during the inquest.
- 10.2 Having regard to the above, the available evidence establishes the following:
- at the time of this death, Mr Zhang was held in the lawful custody of CSNSW;
 - Mr Zhang had a lengthy history of mental illness and was diagnosed with a terminal

cancer, in relation to which he refused treatment on his entry into custody;

- Mr Zhang spent only 3 weeks in LBH until his return to POWH; and
- Mr Zhang was appropriately transferred to POWH when it was clear that the extent of his deterioration required external medical attention.

10.3 The evidence establishes that there was no issue or concern regarding the management of Mr Zhang while at POWH or at LBH prior to his death.

11 Findings pursuant to s81(1) of the Act

11.1 I would like to express my thanks to the Officer in Charge, Senior Constable Jackson Towns and Advocate, Danny Winter-Mirenzi, for all the work they have done in investigating this matter and preparing it for inquest.

11.2 The findings I make under section 81(1) of the Act are:

Identity

The person who died was Wen Liang Zhang.

Date of death

Wen Liang Zhang died on 25 November 2025.

Place of death

He died at the Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick, NSW 2031

Cause of death

The cause of Mr Zhang's death was metastatic lung adenocarcinoma.

Manner of death

Mr Zhang died of natural causes while in the lawful custody of Corrective Services New South Wales.

11.3 On behalf of the Coroner's Court of New South Wales, I offer my sincere and respectful condolences to Mr Zhang's family.

11.4 I close this inquest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Pearce', followed by a period.

Judge Kasey Pearce

Deputy State Coroner

13 July 2026