



**CORONERS COURT  
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Inquest:** Inquest into the disappearance and suspected death of Gavin Cheng

**Hearing dates:** 25 March 2026

**Date of findings:** 25 March 2026

**Place of findings:** NSW State Coroner's Court, Lidcombe

**Findings of:** Magistrate Carmel Forbes, Deputy State Coroner

**Catchwords:** CORONIAL LAW – missing person – whether missing person now deceased – manner and cause of death

**File number:** 2025/00115205

**Representation:** Coronial Advocate Assisting the Coroner: S Chahrouk

**Findings:** **Identity of deceased:** The person who died was Gavin Cheng

**Date of death:** Gavin died on, or sometime very shortly after 29 October 2023

**Place of death:** Gavin died between North Bondi and Dover Heights, NSW

**Cause of death:** As Gavin's body was not found I am not able to make a finding as to the cause of Gavin's death. It may have been as a result of multiple injuries from a fall or from drowning.

**Manner of death:** Gavin's death was intentionally self-inflicted

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## **Introduction**

- 1 This inquest concerns the disappearance and suspected death of Gavin Cheng. At the time of Gavin's disappearance, he was 29 years old. Gavin was last seen alive on 29 October 2023 when he was captured on CCTV footage walking past 18 Military Road in North Bondi.
- 2 Gavin was reported missing on 31 October 2023, and police have made extensive enquiries in an attempt to locate him.
- 3 When police suspect a missing person may have died, the suspected death is reportable to the coroner. Once that report is made the coroner has an obligation to investigate in order to answer a number of questions. The primary question is whether the person is in fact deceased. If that can be established, the coroner is to make further findings as to the date, place, manner and cause of death.<sup>1</sup>
- 4 In addition to deciding these questions, at the conclusion of proceedings, the coroner may, if necessary, make recommendations in relation to matters arising directly from the evidence.<sup>2</sup>

## **Background**

- 5 Gavin was born in Kogarah on 28 October 1994. His parents are Julie Chan and John Cheng. Gavin also has a younger brother.
- 6 Gavin graduated from Peakhurst West Public School and the Sydney Technical High School. He performed well academically and participated in numerous competitions in mathematics, science and geography. He also had an interest in badminton and music, was part of the concert band, participated in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme and volunteered at the Salvation Army Store in Riverwood. In 2010, he competed in an interschool badminton competition and placed third. He graduated in 2012 and achieved an ATAR of 95.60.

- 7 In 2013, Gavin commenced an engineering degree at the University of New South Wales (“UNSW”). He reportedly started smoking cannabis sometime after this.
- 8 Gavin developed an interest in rock climbing and would frequently attend the Sydney Indoor Climbing Gym in St Peters. On 15 December 2013, Gavin told his parents that he was going rock climbing with his friends. At 1:24pm, he presented to the Blue Mountains District Hospital with a fracture of the inferior mid aspect of the talus. Gavin told clinicians that he fell when he was climbing and went into the rock on the side of the cliff, resulting in severe pain and swelling to his right ankle. A back slab was applied to the injury and Gavin was given crutches.
- 9 On 18 December 2013, Gavin saw Dr George Konidaris, an orthopaedic surgeon, where he was given a CAM boot.
- 10 On 29 January 2014, Gavin attended a follow-up appointment where it was noted that he had made excellent progress and could begin weight-bearing and strengthening exercises.
- 11 In July 2014, Gavin applied to enlist in the Australian Defence Force (“ADF”) Army Reserves. His preference was to enlist as a combat engineer or a rifleman.
- 12 On 13 October 2014, Gavin participated in an interview. Given his limited life experience, it was determined that he was qualified for reserve service as a combat engineer but not a rifleman. Given Gavin’s ankle injury, he was asked to provide medical reports to confirm his fitness for service.
- 13 On 29 October 2014, Dr Konidaris provided a report stating that the injury did not require any ongoing intervention or review and that it was unlikely that Gavin would have any sudden or rapid deterioration from the injury. However, Dr Konidaris noted some sclerosis of the lateral aspect.
- 14 On 12 November 2014, Gavin was deemed to be unfit for entry into the ADF. He was told that he could appeal the decision, but no appeal was lodged. Gavin was

understandably disappointed by this decision and his family reported that he became very depressed and continued use cannabis as a result. Gavin continued to withdraw socially, and his personality continued to change. He would frequently leave the house and not return for a day or two.

- 15 In 2015, Gavin's mental health continued to decline. On 18 May 2015, police attended Gavin's home with the acute mental health team. Upon arrival, police observed dirty sheets, old food, a bucket filled with urine and faeces and money with a knife stabbed through it in Gavin's room. Police reviewed Gavin's computer which showed several searches and articles relating to suicide.
- 16 Gavin was taken to the St George Public Hospital. During his admission, he was irritable with staff and denied feeling suicidal. He was placed on medication but was initially non-compliant. Towards the end of his admission, he admitted that he had been quite depressed and had been thinking about suicide prior to his admission. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia. He was discharged on 2 June 2015 after agreeing to not consume cannabis and engage with his family, counselling and other support services.
- 17 The community mental health team continued to visit Gavin for around six months after his discharge from hospital. After this, his mother took Gavin to see his general practitioner or to hospital. However, it is unclear if Gavin remained compliant with his medication during this period. While his father watched Gavin take his medication, Gavin subsequently told his mother that he did not swallow the tablets.
- 18 In 2016, Gavin attempted to continue with his studies at UNSW. However, after switching courses and failing, he did not return to university. His mental health continued to decline.
- 19 On 14 November 2016, Gavin was involuntarily detained under the *Mental Health Act 2007* after several weeks of delusions of passivity, thought broadcasting, thought disorder and increasing disorganisation. He was discharged on 23 November 2016.

- 20 In 2018, Gavin completed a Certificate III in Surveying and Spatial Information Services as well as a Certificate IV in Surveying. During this time, he was casually employed. From this point onwards, Gavin did not seek further employment or education. He reportedly also stopped seeking mental health assistance.
- 21 In 2019 and 2020, Gavin and his family went on holidays to China to visit their extended family. Gavin was described as being “ok” during these trips.
- 22 In 2021, the family moved to Penshurst. Gavin appeared to be happier after the move.
- 23 On 8 June 2022, Gavin told his mother that he had bought a second-hand silver Toyota Corolla sedan.
- 24 On 12 October 2022, Gavin went to live at a secluded permaculture farm property in Koornalla in the Victorian Hinterland. He received free accommodation and food in exchange for help with chores. He lived in a tent set up under a hangar area. Gavin told the owner of the property that he was really messed up and stressed from living in the city and that he wanted to get away from home.
- 25 On 1 February 2023, Gavin left the property after telling the owner that he wanted to go home for his grandmother’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- 26 On 12 March 2023, Gavin sold his car.
- 27 Shortly after Gavin returned home, the family dog, Dory, was given a terminal diagnosis and this made Gavin very sad. Two weeks prior to Gavin’s disappearance, the family took Dory to the park. Dory seemed better and this made Gavin happy.
- 28 On 22 October 2023, the family took Dory to the park again. However, Gavin seemed really sad. He told his mother that he “had a lot to think about”.
- 29 At around 12:05pm on 24 October 2023, Gavin attended the Anaconda store in Rockdale and purchased a Denali black and grey 60L cargo duffle bag. Gavin returned

home and packed his clothes and belongings and told his mother that he was leaving. Later the same day, his mother accessed Gavin's bank account and saw a charge for the Bundanoon Hotel. This made her less worried as Gavin had accommodation. While Gavin was away, his mother continued to check his bank account and saw further charges for the Bundanoon Hotel.

- 30 At around 9:52am on 27 October 2023, Gavin attended the Bundanoon Pharmacy and purchased a dropper bottle. At around 10:01am, he returned and asked for a refund.

### **The last recorded sighting of Gavin**

- 31 On 29 October 2023, Gavin sent a text message to his mother stating that he was coming home. She offered to pick Gavin up from the station, but he said he would walk. Gavin's Opal card records shows that he tapped on a Bundanoon train station at 9:31am and tapped off at the Beverly Hills train station at 12:59pm. At 1:22pm, Gavin returned home with his Denali black and grey bag and a backpack. Gavin left his bag and backpack in his room and told his mother that he had to go again as he was meeting friends.

- 32 At 1:28pm, CCTV at the family home captured Gavin leave while wearing a white or cream coloured t-shirt, black pants, black sneakers and carrying his blue jumper.

- 33 At 1:42pm, Gavin was seen on CCTV footage walking past BWS Penhurst. He returned a minute later and purchased a pack of Brookvale Union Lemon Squash and placed them into a green Woolworths canvas bag.

- 34 At 1:46pm, Gavin was seen on CCTV at Penshurst railway station carrying the green Woolworths canvas bag.

- 35 At 2:29pm, Gavin was seen on CCTV footage exiting Bondi Junction railway station. At this time, he was wearing his blue jumper.

- 36 Between 2:35pm and 2:44pm, Gavin was captured on CCTV waiting for a bus at the bus interchange.
- 37 At 3:02pm, Gavin was captured on CCTV sitting in the rear of a bus headed towards North Bondi. At 3:07pm, Gavin tapped off and got off the bus outside the North Bondi Grocer on Campbell Parade.
- 38 At 3:11pm, Gavin was seen on CCTV walking northbound on the western footpath of Military Road in North Bondi. He was seen walking past 18 Military Road. His phone last pinged in the Dover Heights area suggesting he remained between North Bondi and Dover Heights.

#### **The police investigation and efforts to locate Gavin**

- 39 On 31 October 2023, Gavin's mother attended Hurstville police station and reported Gavin as a missing person.
- 40 Police conducted a triangulation on Gavin's phone number, which showed that it was last active at 6:44pm on 29 October 2023. Police conducted further checks on Gavin's phone. The last text message was received at 6:05pm and showed that the phone was at North Dover Heights. At 6:33pm, the phone location data showed 11 locations in North Dover Heights and Manly North Head. Detective Senior Constable Talbot opined that due to the timing at 6:33pm being between North Dover Heights and Manly North Head, the last location of Gavin's phone was somewhere between North Bondi and Watsons Bay, potentially in the vicinity of the Gap.
- 41 Between 1:17am and 1:31am on 1 November 2023, PolAir conducted searches but did not find anything. On the same date, Water Police conducted a search but also did not find anything.
- 42 On the same date, a media release was released with multiple online newspapers and the NSW Police Force Facebook page asking for information about Gavin's whereabouts.

- 43 On 2 November 2023, PolAir conducted a further search of the area between Bondi and Watsons Bay but did not find Gavin. Water Police also conducted a further search of the area between Watsons Bay and South Bondi but did not find anything.
- 44 On 3 November 2025, PolAir and Water Police conducted further searches of the cliffs and rock areas around Bondi and Watsons Bay.
- 45 On the same date, Police sent geotargeted text messages to members of the public. Various alleged sightings of Gavin were reported to police and investigated. None of these sightings were confirmed. There were no further reported sightings of Gavin after this date.
- 46 On 13 November 2025, police reviewed CCTV footage from multiple busses that were driving along Military Road at around the time that Gavin was last seen alive. One bus drove north along Military Road approximately 4 minutes after Gavin walked past 18 Military Road. Detective Senior Constable Talbot noted that if Gavin had continued walking north on Military Road, then he would have been visible on this footage. However, he was not sighted. Further, Gavin was also not sighted on CCTV footage from 54 Military Road (which is around 550m away from where he was last sighted). The area around where Gavin disappeared encompasses the area of the Bondi Golf Club, the Bondi Wastewater Treatment Plant, the Hugh Bamford Reserve and surrounding streets. After reviewing this footage, Detective Senior Constable Talbot had four theories:
- (1) Gavin could have walked past 18 Military Road and then crossed the road to the path towards the North Bondi sewer vent and Aboriginal rock engravings. From this area, Gavin could have accessed the rocks and climbed down and jumped into the water without being seen. There are no CCTV cameras in this area.
  - (2) Gavin could have continued walking along Military Road and crossed the road to Medland-Bamford Ramp. Gavin could then have gained access to High

Bamford Reserve and a secluded area behind the houses at 38-50 Wentworth Street in Vacluse. However, Gavin was not captured on CCTV footage from 50 Wentworth Street (noting that there were skipping issues with the footage).

(3) Gavin continued walking and turned westbound at some point. Multiple streets on both the eastern and western side of Military Road were canvassed without success.

(4) Gavin left his mobile phone somewhere and turned around and walked back to Bondi Beach or other location without utilising his Opal card or his bank card. Detective Senior Constable Talbot considered this to be least likely scenario.

47 Between 14 November 2023 and 20 November 2023, police canvassed further locations for CCTV footage. While further footage was obtained, there were no confirmed sightings of Gavin. Footage was also obtained from Sydney Water from a camera covering the Blair Street gate (other footage was not available as the camera systems were being upgraded at the time). A person was sighted wearing blue clothing however police could not determine if it was a male or a female and could not confirm if it was Gavin.

48 In early 2024, further checks were conducted on Gavin's phone. Electronic based monitoring data showed that between 19 October 2023 and 29 October 2023, Gavin's phone was almost always connected to the network, meaning that Gavin kept his phone charged and turned on. Gavin's phone has not connected to the network since around 8:29pm on 29 October 2023. Police also did not find any records suggesting that Gavin had another SIM card or phone number.

49 On 25 March 2024, Gavin's mother contacted Police about a charge on her card for \$98.80. The charge related to the booking of a taxi in Melbourne. Police investigated this and obtained video footage from the taxi which showed a female not connected with Gavin. The matter was referred to Victoria Police for investigation.

- 50 Police also contacted the owner of the secluded farm property in the Victorian Hinterland to no avail.
- 51 Since Gavin's disappearance, police have not found any evidence of any medical, financial, telephone, electronic or other activity by Gavin. Police also have not been able to locate Gavin's phone, bank card and Opal card.
- 52 Based on the police investigation, Detective Senior Constable Talbot believed that Gavin was still suffering with symptoms of schizophrenia based on the information from family. Gavin was not eating very much, sleeping very much, did not look after himself well, believed that he was being poisoned by his doctor or by any medication.
- 53 Detective Senior Constable Talbot opined that Gavin died on 29 October 2023 in the North Bondi or Dover Heights area and that he died from injuries sustained from a fall from height after intentionally jumping from a coastal cliff.

### **Consideration**

- 54 A finding that a person is deceased is a finding of great significance and gravity, not only for the family members of that person and the emotional toll that such a finding will invariably bring, but also because such a finding carries with it important legal and administrative consequences. Such a finding is made on the balance of probabilities, but there must be clear, cogent and exact evidence that a person has died before it can be made.<sup>1</sup>
- 55 The available evidence establishes the following:
- (1) Gavin was last seen alive on 29 October 2023.
  - (2) Despite extensive and comprehensive searches undertaken by police, no evidence has been obtained indicating that Gavin is still alive.

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<sup>1</sup> *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336.

- (3) Although Gavin would occasionally leave home for periods of time, the evidence indicates that he would continue to have contact with his family by phone. His phone was also almost always connected to the network. For example, when Gavin resided in Victoria, his phone remained connected to the network, and he kept his phone charged by solar battery so that he could be contactable if necessary.
- (4) Prior to Gavin's disappearance, he would regularly use his Opal card and bank card. There is no evidence that these have been used since his disappearance.
- (5) While Gavin had previously resided in a remote area in Victoria, there is no evidence suggesting that he has returned to this area or that he has planned to reside in another remote location.
- (6) There have been no confirmed sightings of Gavin since his disappearance despite geotargeted text messages being sent to members of the public and various media release.

56 Having considered all of the evidence and, in particular, the matters set out above, I am satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Gavin is now deceased.

57 I am satisfied that he died in the area between North Bondi and Dover Heights sometime or very shortly after, 29 October 2023 and that he intentionally took his own life.

58 As Gavin's body was not found, I do not consider that the evidence enables me to make a finding as to the direct cause of Gavin's death. It may have been as a result of either multiple injuries from a fall or from drowning.

## **Findings**

For the reasons set out above, I make the following findings pursuant to s 81(1) of the Act

***Identity***

The person who died was Gavin Cheng.

***Date of death***

Gavin died on or sometime very shortly after 29 October 2023.

***Place of death***

Gavin died between North Bondi and Dover Heights, NSW

***Cause of death***

As Gavin's body was not found I am not able to make a finding as to the cause of Gavin's death. It may have been as a result of multiple injuries from a fall or from drowning.

***Manner of death***

Gavin's death was intentionally self-inflicted

**Conclusion**

59 On behalf of the Court, I express my sincere and respectful condolences to Gavin's family and friends for their tragic loss. I assure Gavin's family that should further information ever become available about the date, place, manner and cause of Gavin's death; the inquest can be re-opened.

60 I thank the officer in charge, Detective Senior Constable Trudy Talbot, for the very thorough investigation and for preparing a detailed brief of evidence. I also express my gratitude to the coronial advocate assisting me throughout the inquest, Sam Chahrouk.

Magistrate Carmel Forbes  
Deputy State Coroner  
NSW State Coroner's Court, Lidcombe

25 March 2026

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