



**CORONER'S COURT
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

Inquest: Inquest into the death of Ivan Spudic

Hearing dates: 14 and 17 September 2026

Date of findings: 8 October 2026

Place of findings: Coroner's Court of New South Wales

Findings of: Judge David O'Neil, Deputy State Coroner

Catchwords: CORONIAL LAW unascertained manner and cause, unreliable admissions made by partner

File number: 2023/453003

Representation: Mr C McGorey, i/by Ms E Blomfield of the Crown Solicitor's Office

Findings: I make the following findings in relation to the death of Ivan Spudic pursuant to s 81 of the *Coroners Act 2009* (NSW):

Identity:

The person who died was Ivan Spudic

Date of death:

Between 11:30pm on 8 December 2023 and midday on
12 December 2023

Place of death:

Tregear, NSW

Cause of death:

Unascertained

Manner of death:

Unascertained

Protective Orders

Orders pursuant to section 74(1)(b) of the *Coroners Act 2009* prohibiting the publication of certain evidence have been made in this inquest.

Orders have also been made pursuant to section 65(4) of the *Coroners Act 2009*. A copy of the orders can be found on the Registry file.

Introduction

- 1 Ivan Spudic was found deceased by his mother, Elizabeth Spudic, at about 12pm on 13 December 2023, inside his home at Tregear.
- 2 Mr Spudic whom I shall refer to as Ivan had been a long term user of heroin (since his mid-teenage years). At the time of his death, he was a methadone patient at the New Beginnings Opioid Addiction Treatment Centre in Mt Druitt
- 3 Mrs Spudic was notified by the methadone treatment centre on the morning of 13 December 2023 that her son had missed his scheduled daily doses on 11, 12 and 13 December. This was very unusual for Ivan.
- 4 When Mrs Spudic attended Ivan's home she found him deceased, in the hallway. She immediately attended a residence across the road and police were called.
- 5 Ivan was found to be in an advanced stage of decomposition.

Inquest

- 6 An inquest was held on 14 and 17 September 2026.
- 7 An inquest is a public examination of the circumstances of death. It provides an opportunity to closely consider what led to the death.
- 8 The primary function of an inquest is to identify the circumstances in which the death occurred, and to make the formal findings required under s 81 of the *Coroners Act 2009* (NSW) (the Act); namely:
 - the person's identity;
 - the date and place of the person's death; and
 - the manner and cause of death.

- 9 Another purpose of an inquest is to consider whether it is necessary or desirable to make recommendations in relation to any matter connected with the death. This involves identifying any lessons that can be learned from the death, and whether anything should or could be done differently in the future, to prevent a death in similar circumstances.
- 10 In Ivan's case the cause of death was unable to be ascertained at autopsy.
- 11 Multiple benzodiazepines were detected in Ivan's spleen fluid, as well as a high level of methadone and alcohol. The pathologist who conducted the autopsy explained in her written report that the postmortem blood concentration of methadone would, potentially, be at a fatal level assuming that same concentration arose antemortem (before death). However postmortem redistribution processes meant that the postmortem concentration may be higher than that clinically operating before death.
- 12 Professor Alison Jones, expert toxicologist was consulted and she advised that it would not be possible to provide a definitive toxicology response in circumstances where the level of decomposition imposed serious caveats on the interpretation of the identified drugs.
- 13 It is of note that there was no sign of any injury occasioned to Ivan.
- 14 As Ivan's cause of death was unascertained it was required that an inquest be held.

Coronial Investigation

- 15 Prior to holding an inquest, a detailed coronial investigation was undertaken. The coronial investigation was led by Detective Senior Constable Renae Moloney. Investigating Police compiled an initial brief of evidence, including statements from Both police and civilians. Extensive documentary material was gathered from police n numerous Hospitals. In addition, electronic material was gathered from both police equipment and community sites.

- 16 The documents obtained during the coronial investigation ultimately formed part of the six volume brief of evidence that was tendered at the commencement of the inquest. Material was also received and tendered during the inquest. All of that material, and the oral evidence at the inquest, have been considered in making the findings detailed below.

Unusual circumstances surrounding the investigation into Ivan's death (Mr Coull confesses)

- 17 Mr Spudic's death was initially treated as not suspicious by NSW police. It was thought to have been the result of either natural causes or a drug overdose. This took into account Mr Spudic's physical comorbidities including HIV, Hepatitis C and liver cirrhosis, his mental health profile and his lengthy history of drug use.
- 18 The course of the investigation changed after Blake Coull, whom I shall refer to as Mr Coull, contacted triple zero and spoke with police on 12 January 2024 and made statements to the effect that he had choked and killed Mr Spudic
- 19 Later on the evening of 12 January 2024, following Mr Coull's call to triple zero from a payphone in Penrith two uniformed officers attended on his location and spoke to him at the scene. Their interaction was captured on body worn camera.
- 20 Mr Coull was arrested by the attending police and taken to Penrith Police Station. While there he had a recorded interaction with Detective Senior Constable Moloney.
- 21 Due to Mr Coull's "admissions" he was advised he had a sufficient interest in the subject-matter of the inquest which entitled him to appear at and be represented during, the inquest if he so desired.
- 22 Mr Coull attended the inquest and gave evidence. He indicated he had spoken to a Barrister prior to attending the inquest but was not represented during the inquest.
- 23 The focus of the oral evidence at inquest was to determine what weight could be given to the various statements of Mr Coull in relation to Ivan's death and to determine if any findings could comfortably be made in relation the manner and cause of Ivan's death.

24 Before returning to those issues, I will set out some background.

Background

25 Ivan was born on 23 May 1973. He was the youngest of three siblings with an older sister and brother. Ivan's family originally lived in Willoughby and then moved to Bidwill when he was two. His father was unwell during Ivan's childhood. His mother acted as a carer for Ivan's father, for which she received a carer's pension. Ivan's father passed away in 2000.

26 Ivan had a close relationship with his mother and sister up until his death. Ivan reportedly began heroin use in his early to mid-teenage years when he was introduced to that drug through his relationship with an older person.

27 At about the age of 25, Ivan left his family home and began living in Department of Housing accommodation in Tregear, where he remained until his death.

28 Ivan had a relationship with a male which commenced at around the time that he moved into the house in Tregear. They dated for a few years but did not live together. This is the only relationship that Ivan's family were aware of, apart from Ivan's relationship with Blake.

29 Over the years, Ivan attended a number of hospitals and medical centres, including the Albion Centre, Mount Druitt Hospital, Blacktown Hospital, and Nepean Hospital. Ivan was diagnosed with HIV, liver cirrhosis, and hepatitis C.

30 Ivan's hepatitis C was diagnosed in his early 20s, and he was successfully treated for that condition by 2018. Ivan was diagnosed with HIV in about 2006 and consistently sought treatment for that illness through the Albion Centre up until his death. Dr Melissa Kelly was Ivan's primary treating specialist at the Albion Centre. Ivan was under her direct care from late 2017 until the time of his death.

31 Dr Kelly reported that as of May 2022, Ivan maintained a consistently undetectable HIV viral load with preserved immunological functioning, indicating good antiretroviral medication adherence. In the period before his death, Ivan's HIV was effectively managed with no evidence of immune suppression and an undetectable viral load.

The doctor continued, "There is no medical reason to expect that his HIV diagnosis would, of itself, have led to a shortened life expectancy."

- 32 Ivan also suffered from major depression, generalised anxiety, panic disorder, PTSD, as well as frequently presenting with psychotic phenomena. His medical records note a background of physical childhood abuse at the hand of his father. Ivan was on occasion admitted to mental health inpatient units for short periods in his early adult life. Through his engagement with the Albion Centre, Ivan was referred to the centre's clinic psychologist, Brendan Crozier, in 2010, and engaged in appointments for five years. He ceased engagement with Mr Crozier in 2015, but re-engaged with the centre's psychology services around early 2022.
- 33 Ivan commenced long time methadone treatment at about the age of 19. That treatment continued throughout his adult life, up until his death. Ivan had a long history of using prohibited drugs and non-prescribed medications including cannabis, benzodiazepines, and on occasion, other drugs such as methamphetamine and cocaine. There is evidence of Ivan stating to medical staff that he also acquired extra methadone, buying from the street. Blake, in oral evidence, indicated that purchasing extra methadone on the street continued up until Ivan's death. I consider that likely to be accurate. Blake confirmed that he also purchased methadone on the street on occasions.
- 34 Urine testing carried out between 2022 and 2023 indicated that Ivan regularly tested positive for non-prescribed benzodiazepines and cannabis. Blake gave evidence that the methadone clinic which they both attended, at least during 2023, tolerated positive results for cannabis. Ivan also reportedly consumed relatively high quantities of alcohol regularly, at least in the years before his death. He was also a regular smoker of tobacco, reportedly smoking about 15 cigarettes a day.
- 35 Ivan had multiple presentations to emergency departments for treatment for drug overdoses. He presented to the Nepean Hospital's emergency department in late December 2022 when he was found unconscious outside his home, and again in late March 2023 when he was found in a park, incoherent from a suspected opioid overdose.
- 36 Ivan was known to police between 1990 and 2022 for criminal offending mainly relating to dishonesty, drug, and personal violence offences.

- 37 Ivan engaged in substance use counselling between 2018 and 2019 through the Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment, or MERIT, program, after being charged with being in possession of goods suspected of being stolen.
- 38 Ivan had a history of conflict with neighbours which led to the involvement of police on occasions.
- 39 Before his death, Ivan was charged with assault occasioning actual bodily harm against his neighbour, Ms Ellis. In a statement completed for the coronial proceedings, Ms Ellis alleged Ivan had assaulted her with a mobile phone. An apprehended personal violence order was taken out by police against Ivan for Ms Ellis's protection. Ivan passed away before these matters were finalised in court.

Background of Mr Coull (Blake)

- 40 Blake was born on 6 August 1999. He was 26 years Ivan's junior.
- 41 He attended mainstream school until year 7. He was in a school for students with emotional and intellectual problems up until year 9. He reported being expelled from school for breaking a student's nose with a chair. He had childhood diagnoses of mild intellectual disability, oppositional defiance disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and reactive attachment disorder. These were all diagnoses of a psychiatrist and paediatrician in the period 2007 to 2014. Blake was treated with the mood stabilizer sodium valproate and the stimulant methylphenidate.
- 42 Blake had long-term treatment with methadone. It was last dispensed to him on 11 December 2023. On an occasion in custody, he had been prescribed buprenorphine injections as an alternative for opioid dependence. He reported smoking heroin from age 21. He reported cannabis use daily from age 12. He began using alcohol as a teenager. He reported smoking methamphetamine from ages 14 and 15 on a daily basis as an adult. He also was a tobacco smoker.

Blake's criminal history

- 43 Blake has an extensive criminal record.

- 44 As an adult, Blake has convictions for not give particulars; use carriage service to menace, harass, offend; shoplifting; larceny; goods in custody; steal motor vehicle; break and enter; possess or attempt to possess prescribed restrictive substance; destroy or damage property; assault police officer causing actual bodily harm; enter enclosed land; possess ammunition; and possess drug. He had custodial sentences in 2019 to 2020, and community sentences otherwise.
- 45 On 28 February 2022, Blake is reported to have headbutted, choked, twisted the hand of, and spat on his female ex-partner at her house. He was charged with common assault and intentionally choke. He presented himself at the police station on 3 March 2022 where he appeared to be intoxicated with methamphetamine. He was considered too erratic to be interviewed. He was convicted for common assault, but not of the more serious charges. He was dealt with by way of a community order and an apprehended violence order was taken out. In custody, he had reported to staff being the victim of assault and sexual assault whilst in custody.
- 46 Dr Andrew Ellis was asked for an opinion in relation to Blake's mental state, with particular focus on the date 12 January 2024. Dr Ellis indicated that there is reasonable information to conclude that Blake suffers from a mild intellectual disability, noting, *"While children who are exposed to traumatic events and social deprivation can show low performance on these measures, and later in life improve, in the case of Blake, his early assessments likely reflect his innate intellectual ability as he has not shown the sort of improvement referred to. His chronic substance use may have further worsened cognitive performance."*
- 47 Dr Ellis noted that the terminology *"mild intellectual disability"* is a terminology in comparison to other forms of disability. It is a serious (not mild) condition which impairs function. Less than 1% of the general population will have intellectual function at this level.
- 48 Dr Ellis noted also that it was clear that Blake suffers from a substance use disorder. Substances of concern include opioids, benzodiazepines, cannabis, alcohol, and stimulants. He noted he'd required replacement therapy treatment (methadone) and that substance use had impaired relationships, social function, caused legal problems, and exacerbated problems with Blake's mental health. This disorder would be considered severe, owing to the length and variety of use.

49 Dr Ellis went on to note that Blake has long term problems with emotional regulation, impulse control, and interpersonal function. In Dr Ellis's view, Blake would certainly qualify for at least one or a combination of the following diagnoses: *post-traumatic stress disorder, personality disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and mood or anxiety disorders*. Doctor further noted that by 2023, Blake began to present with psychotic symptoms, including hallucinations and disorganised speech. Dr Ellis said that such occasions appeared to be periodic and related to substance use, particularly methamphetamine, which is known to cause these symptoms transiently. The symptoms respond to anti-psychotic treatment and are only observed infrequently. Doctor noted that by July 2024, Blake had regular anti-psychotic treatment, and it appeared to resolve the symptoms. In evidence, Blake indicated he had been sober for eight months.

Relationship between Ivan and Blake

50 The precise timing of the commencement of Ivan's relationship with Blake is unclear. The relationship was definitely on foot by mid-2023 and may have commenced as early as the first half of 2022. Ivan's mother and sister regularly encountered Blake at Ivan's residence when they attended there. Ivan's sister reported to police after her brother's death that Blake had moved into Ivan's residence. Blake's mail address for bank statements listed the Tregear residence, consistent with him treating it as his primary residence.

51 As I have indicated, Blake was 26 years Ivan's junior. I am satisfied that Ivan and Blake's relationship was tempestuous and involved abuse and some violence on occasions. Ivan's family, neighbours, and friends, as well as methadone clinic staff, reported observing volatility and violence in the relationship. Police holdings also revealed their attendance at Ivan's address on five occasions for reported domestic violence. Police attended the Tregear residence in response to reported violence by Blake upon Ivan on 21 June 2023, 2 July 2023, 3 September 2023, 28 October 2023, and November 2023. These interactions, with the exception of 2 July 2023, resolved with no further action being taken by police.

- 52 I am unclear whether there was a second incident on 2 July 2023, but on that date, police attended on Ivan in response to an alleged assault by him on Blake. Ivan had attended a unit complex in Mount Druitt and approached Blake, stating, "*You dog, you wait.*" The two argued at the scene, and there was a fall in which there was minor injury. Police put in place an apprehended domestic violence order against Ivan for the protection of Blake, without any charges being laid.
- 53 On 20 November 2023, Blake was attended on by police and ambulance at a licenced venue in Mount Druitt after a reported overdose. Blake said he had consumed three Xanax tablets, an unknown quantity of ice, alcohol, and methadone. Records state that Blake's partner was on the scene and mildly aggressive towards Blake, police, and paramedics. Blake became emotionally distressed when his partner was speaking. The partner stated Blake was violent and asked paramedics if it is acceptable to hit your partner if they were both males. Blake was taken to Blacktown Hospital and later discharged himself in the company of Ivan.
- 54 Blake was admitted to Blacktown Hospital as an involuntary patient with a drug overdose and poisoning as well as for his mental health on 22 November 2023. He had been found sitting on the ground at Westfields (as said), Mount Druitt. He presented with auditory hallucinations and was very tearful and emotionally erratic. He stated he did not want to hurt anyone else. On admission to hospital, Blake said he wanted to shoot himself.
- 55 During that admission, a psychiatrist met with Ivan. Ivan reported the patient does get irritable/aggressive and psychotic when he uses amphetamine. Ivan said Blake never harmed himself or others. He agreed Blake had improved significantly since his admission to hospital, and agreed if Blake continued to improve, he should be able to be discharged in the following days. Ivan indicated he was happy for Blake to be discharged to his home, noting, "*if Blake would prefer that.*"
- 56 Blake was discharged on 1 December 2023. A psychiatrist note indicated that he would go back to Ivan's (husband) house and that Ivan was happy for same.
- 57 About 8.12pm on 3 December 2023, Constable Joshua O'Donnell interacted with Blake at Mount Druitt train station during patrol. Blake presented as drug-affected, he was sweating and fidgeting. He admitted to using drugs earlier that day. A search of Blake found nil items of interest. In response to questioning, he stated he had nowhere

else to go, and that he couldn't go back to Ivan, and that he doesn't live at Tregear anymore.

- 58 On 7 December 2023, Blake attended the methadone clinic in Mount Druitt to receive his methadone. Records indicate that both Ivan and Blake had each picked up their methadone on 4, 5, and 6 December. On 7 December, a police radio broadcast was made regarding Blake's welfare. This was in response to Blacktown Hospital being unable to contact Blake or Ivan following Blake's discharge on 1 December. At about 4.14 that afternoon, Blake was spoken to by Constable Craig Hickman at Penrith station. He presented with slurred speech, glazed eyes, and appeared unable to answer questions when spoken to.
- 59 At about 6.39pm, Blake was spoken to by Constables Dean Shell and Jayden Vickery at Mount Druitt police station. In the officers' view, Blake appeared affected by alcohol. On that occasion, he was in the company of Ms Goodman.
- 60 Between about 8 and 9pm that evening, Constables Shell and Vickery responded to the VKG broadcast from earlier that day. They attended at Ivan's residence at about 8.16pm and spoke to Ivan. Ivan was recorded to state that he had not seen Blake for several days, that he missed him, and wanted to find him. Ivan appeared intoxicated to police. He had slurred speech and was stumbling as he exited the front of the house. Ivan was emotional when speaking about Blake. Constable Vickery then contacted Ms Goodman who had been seen in Blake's company earlier and Ms Goodman advised that Blake was still with her and that he was fine.
- 61 At about 9.09am on 8 December, Ivan attended the methadone clinic to receive his methadone. He received his daily dose and an additional two takeaways for the weekend. Blake was not with him. At 9.24am, Blake was recorded to have attended the methadone clinic and received a single dose.
- 62 At 2.31pm, Senior Constable Brett Sciberras, together with Senior Constable Brimfield attended on Ivan at a bus stop. Ivan's eyes were closed and he was leaning against the side wall. Ivan reported he was waiting for the bus but had no money. Ivan asked police to take him to the methadone clinic.
- 63 Police declined and instead dropped him home. Police had noted he was holding a container which he told police was his methadone. Police observed the container to

be 90% empty. The officers were familiar with Ivan, and whilst he was a little unsteady on his feet, they did not consider this was out of the ordinary for him.

- 64 At 4.38pm, Constable Kurt Myers spoke with Blake at Mount Druitt train station and issued a warning for travelling without a ticket. Blake was noted to slur during this interaction.
- 65 At 9pm, Constable Bell Leading Senior Constable Rylands attended on Blake at Westfield shopping centre at Mount Druitt. Blake was found alone, slumped against a wall, unresponsive and affected by substances. Blake said he was living at Ivan's residence, that he had taken a "xanny" together with his medication, but he denied having consumed cannabis. When he was asked why he had not
- 66 waited until he got home to take his medication, he indicated he could not wait, he was "very stressed out" that day.
- 67 About 9.51pm, Blake was taken by ambulance to Blacktown Hospital emergency department. Blake self-discharged from Blacktown Hospital about 11.30pm. Around that same time, Ivan's neighbour reported seeing Ivan sitting on his front doorstep in just his underpants. He then went inside and slammed the door shut. This was the last reported sighting of Ivan alive.
- 68 At about 9am the next morning, Senior Constable Munt spoke to Blake at Penrith railway station. He was found sleeping across a vestibule in a carriage of a stationary train. He had hospital electrode pads on his inner wrist from his admission the night before. Blake produced to police his discharge papers. He said he was heading home to Mount Druitt after a long night. He was asked if he was still living in Tregear. Blake mumbled something which the attending police were unable to hear. He said in addition, he was trying to get to Mount Druitt.
- 69 Blake attended the methadone clinic that day at 10.15am, and again the next day, 10 December, at 7.47am. At 6.45am on 11 December, Blake was recorded to have attended the methadone clinic and received a single dose as he did on each of the prior days. Ivan did not attend on 11 or 12 December. Whilst his non-attendance on 9 and 10 December was consistent with him having received the additional doses on 8 December, he should have attended, according to his usual attendance, on 11 and 12 December.

- 70 About midday on 12 December, a friend of Ivan, Mr Gentle, reported attending Ivan's home but getting no answer. Mr Gentle reported to police that he found the front wooden door was open with the screen door closed. He noticed a large amount of blowflies and a bad smell coming from the house, but he did not attempt to enter. He believed it would have been disrespectful to do so. I am satisfied that Ivan was deceased by the time Mr Gentle attended his premises on 12 December at about midday.
- 71 On that same day, Mr Coull attended the methadone clinic and was refused his dose. There are conflicting accounts as to why he was not provided his dose. One staff member indicated that Blake had rosary beads which he rubbed and played with and was sweating and talking to himself. Further, it was indicated that when he was refused his dose, owing to concerns at his behaviour, he did not protest and left quietly. The staff member who made that report indicated that she thought his departure without fuss was strange, as he had previously caused a scene and put on a performance when he had been refused his dose.
- 72 The other account is found in the Blacktown Hospital notes. This records a conversation between hospital staff and a different methadone clinic staff member in which that staff member states that Blake had been refused his dose because he did not have enough money and had also attended the clinic with a random 'bloke' and left mumbling when she asked for payment.
- 73 As set out above, at about 8.30am on 13 December, Ivan's mother was contacted to report his missed doses.
- 74 Following Mrs Spudic's report, police attended the premises at about 12.30pm on 13 December 2023. They found Ivan deceased lying in the hallway. He was severely decomposed. He was described to be lying on his back with both hands in the air and legs raised with knees bent at a 90 degree angle. Attending police noted syringes scattered on the floor and multiple different prescription medications in Ivan's name were on a bench in the front room. Drug paraphernalia was also seen in various rooms of the residence.
- 75 The attending officers left the premises and declared a crime scene, maintaining a crime scene guard thereafter until the completion of the crime scene examination. I am satisfied the scene was subsequently thoroughly examined. During that

examination, the front doorway was observed to consist of a screen door and a heavy main timber door. The screen door did not have any damage to the lock, however there was a small hole in the fly screen. The heavy main door was intact and there was minor separation of the exterior deadbolt from the door panel. However, there were nil signs of significant damage to the door locks.

- 76 The examiners, during their examination at the scene, did not detect any noticeable fractures or breakages to Ivan's skull. No suspicious injuries were noted. In the view of the examiners, there were no obvious signs of forced entry to the premises or indications of ransacking or of a struggle.
- 77 The autopsy previously referred to was conducted by Dr Kendall Bailey. Spleen fluid was analysed and the following were detected: diazepam and its metabolites, 7-aminoclonazepam, paracetamol, bromazepam, alprazolam, methadone. Dr Bailey opined that while multiple benzodiazepines were detected, similar levels in peripheral blood of non-decomposed individuals would be considered non-toxic. She considered the benzodiazepines alone are unlikely to have caused Mr Spudic's death.
- 78 While the combination of benzodiazepines and alcohol may have potentiated the sedating effects of both classes of substances, it is unclear how much of the alcohol detected was due to post-mortem production. Mr Spudic's level of methadone would be fatal to most individuals, assuming an antemortem or pre-death blood concentration of that level. Dr Bailey went on to observe: "*There is an absence of normative data to suggest what level would be fatal in spleen fluids and therefore it cannot be determined if methadone toxicity was the sole cause of Mr Spudic's death.*"
- 79 Dr Bailey considered that the level of methadone detected could or might have been affected by post-mortem redistribution from reservoirs such as the stomach, gallbladder or other tissue or organ.
- 80 A radiology report dated 5 March 2024 was prepared. It noted extensive decompositional changes, as well as minimally displaced nasal bone fractures on the right side. These were confirmed to be old fractures.
- 81 Mr Spudic's neck pathology was noted to be unremarkable. There was normal alignment of the cervical spine, with no acute fracture evidence. The thyroid bone and

the laryngeal cartilages were defined normally, and there was no soft tissue abnormality identified.

- 82 Ultimately, as previously indicated, Dr Bailey expressed the view that the cause of death could not be ascertained. No preference could be expressed as to whether Ivan had died from a drug overdose or natural causes.

Blake Coull's statements and actions following Ivan's death.

- 83 At about 9.25pm on 13 December 2023, Blake was admitted to Nepean Hospital as an involuntary patient after being found by police face down on the ground at a bus stop in Blackett. Blake was able to be awakened but appeared delirious and unaware of his surroundings. In hospital, Blake was noted as having auditory and visual hallucinations, talking to himself and reciting religious scriptures. Blake entered the Nepean Hospital's acute mental health ward on 14 December and remained there until his discharge on 5 January 2024.
- 84 The records made during his admission included the following. On 15 December Blake stated, "*My partner is in heaven.*" It was noted that despite denying having any voices, Blake continued to respond to internal stimuli and thought disordered, incomprehensible at times, chat to himself. He continued to talk to himself throughout review with religious themes of mercy, God talking to him and whispering Satan towards the person conducting the review. He was unable to provide any history regarding recent events since his previous discharge. He was unable to give any information about drug use in that period. He claimed to be living with a male partner named Mickey but could not indicate how long ago it was that he had seen him. He remained significantly thought disordered.
- 85 The medical staff made a decision in the early days not to pass on to Blake the fact of Ivan's death. On 18 December he was noted to remain thought disordered. He made claims of being married to Muhammad Ali, stating he was married to him before his death. He then initially gave consent for clinicians to talk to his mother and Ivan but

then refused. Again it was noted that staff had not revealed to him the news of Ivan's passing.

86 On 27 December, Blake told hospital staff he had not seen Ivan for four months and did not want to engage with him. On 3 January, staff recorded informing Blake of Ivan's death. The notes indicate patient observed to be depressed and grieving after being told of patient's [sic] passing. A further note indicated his partner was his rock and he believes it is his fault for his partner's passing. Blake said it was his fault for not letting him be discharged two weeks ago. He assumes Ivan overdosed. Proximate to his discharge Blake stated he was excited to go home but also scared that they will blame him for what happened to Ivan.

87 Following discharge on 5 January, at about 2am on 9 January, Sergeant Russell Smith attended Central Train Station in a matter unrelated to Blake. At the station he interacted with Blake after seeing Blake walking with an adjustable aluminium walking cane that had a USB charging cable wrapped around the handle. Blake said he was suffering from a mental health breakdown and that he was homeless, had not slept in four days, confirmed he still lived at Tregear and indicated he had not had his Seroquel since last Thursday. Blake presented with slurred speech and difficulties answering questions. An ambulance was called and he was conveyed to RPA. He was admitted to RPA as an involuntary patient and remained admitted there until his discharge on 12 January.

88 Records included the following:

- (1) Blake stated he likes living rough and likes sleeping on trains because they rocked him to sleep.
- (2) Blake told staff that his name had been taken off Public Housing Tenancy, stating, "*I nearly killed a man there. I was frightened so I left.*"
- (3) Blake was noted to be labile in his mood, stating he attempted to strangle his partner a few years ago and how he was regretful of this.
- (4) He started feeling depressed in context of the death of his partner and reported it happened a few weeks ago.

- (5) He was recorded as saying, *"I swear if I found out who did that to him, I'll kill him."*
- (6) He was asked if he believed someone had killed his partner and he responded, *"Yeah, and they're looking for him."* When asked to elaborate, Blake instead reminisced about his time with Ivan.
- 89 Following discharge from RPA on 12 January 2024, Blake made his way to Penrith and made a triple-0 call from a payphone. In that triple-0 call, he said the following, *"I killed Ivan. I choked him out. I choked him out twice. I just grabbed him by the neck and I just killed him."* He indicated he had a few drinks the day of the phone call. He then continued, *"I choked him out with my fingers."* When asked if he was inside or outside, he said, *"I was inside. I'd done it silently so no one would see it."* When asked where the deceased was, he said, *"I don't know where he is."* He went on to say, *"I've attempted to knock two people. The first person was Jake,"* who he described trying to knock when he, Blake, was a kid, *"like six"*, but Jake lived. *"He didn't die."* He said he choked him out with a remote. He said that Jake was a friend and he said that he tried to kill him because he, Jake, would not give Blake the remote.
- 90 At about 11.40pm, police approached the payphone and spoke with Blake. He said to those police, *"I just lost my temper and choked him out,"* in reference to Ivan. He gave Ivan's full name and said he was his partner. He gave an incorrect address as to where the event had happened. He said he did not know where he put him. He could not remember. He described the event as happening in the lounge room a few months ago and then said, *"I didn't mean to kill him."*
- 91 When asked if he had been drinking that night, he confirmed he had a few beers. He said he was a lightweight and then indicated he had had six or seven beers and was half tanked. When asked if he remembered when this happened, he said, *"I don't even know where he is, but if I ever find out who done it, I'd kill him. I would."*
- 92 He then confirmed he remembered choking him out. He was asked if he had been to the house since. He said no. When asked why not, he said he was too scared to go back because *"I love him."* He then said, *"I didn't actually kill him. I just wanted to know who did, because if I killed him, I would have fucked him up first. You feeling me?"*

- 93 He was arrested and taken to Penrith Police Station where he spoke with Detective Senior Constable Maloney. He was asked if he knew why he was in custody in the police station. He said, "*Cause I said that I killed someone.*" He was asked, "*And when you said just then because you killed someone,*" he responded, "*Tried to twice.*" He said, "*It was very scary, trust me.*" When asked, "*What was scary?*" he said, "*Trying to kill someone twice.*" He was asked who the person was and he again referred to Jake. He said he choked him out with an Xbox controller.
- 94 When asked what happened to Ivan, he said, "*Well apparently people on the street, someone choked him to death.*" Detective Senior Constable Maloney said, "*Someone choked him to death?*" Blake said, "*That's what they're saying.*" He later said, "*That's what everyone on the street was saying. They were trying to say that I choked him to death.*" He then said, "*But it's fucking wrong. I didn't choke him to death. I just want to know who did so I can kill him.*" There were further exchanges.
- 95 Subsequently Blake declined to comment further about the matter, and he declined to be formally interviewed after speaking to the Aboriginal Legal Service.
- 96 Police later released Blake without charge and offered to request an ambulance to assess him. When he was being released from police custody he said, "*I told you I murdered someone and you letting me walk free.*" He was told, "*Yes, you are unarrested now. You told me that you didn't kill him. Did you kill him?*" Blake responded, "*Oh no, I didn't. I just wanted to know who did kill him.*"
- 97 Following these multiple comments by Blake, on 14 January 2024 a second crime scene examination of Ivan's house was completed under the authority of a crime scene warrant. In that examination, no relevant evidence was obtained save for bank statements retrieved from the letterbox which were addressed to Blake being from the Commonwealth Bank.
- 98 The day after, that is on 15 January 2024, Ivan's neighbour saw Blake at the residence. The neighbour indicated: "*On Monday 15 January, after 3pm, my daughter got a message from our neighbour saying, 'Check your cameras because the boyfriend has just kicked the door in.'* We were on our way home when the neighbour messaged us so arrived home when Blake was still there. When we got home the door was closed but as soon as we got there the door opened and I saw Blake. Blake put his head down. I remember he had an umbrella and he walked away. So after I got home, I

started looking at the footage and saw Blake had gone to the house. Blake was holding a paper bag. He kicked the door in, however this is how he always opened the door because he never had a key. Blake was just pacing up and down and he looked confused like he didn't know what was going on. Blake would have stayed for about 15 or 20 minutes. Blake then left and walked up the driveway. My security camera has captured this. It's saved on my phone."

- 99 Blake again interacted with police on 17 January 2024. He presented as unsteady on his feet and appeared fixated on the police firearm. He later indicated he had had two Xanax tablets and smoked cannabis about one hour earlier.
- 100 On 18 January, Mr Gentle reported to police his conversation with Blake a few days before. He indicated he asked Blake if he killed Ivan. Blake said no. He said he had confessed to police and that he had done that because he wanted to find out who did kill Ivan. Blake said this was the second person he tried to knock. Blake then started crying and saying that he missed Ivan.
- 101 About 8.15am on 19 January there was a further interaction with police at Central Train Station. Blake appeared lost and dishevelled. He was mumbling incoherently and was difficult to understand. He stated, *"I need the ambulance,"* and that his head had been spinning all day. He was conveyed to St Vincent's Hospital for assessment. He was subsequently again admitted to the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital for mental health treatment. He was floridly psychotic, but his hospitalisation was also motivated, according to records, by him wanting somewhere to sleep and issues with homelessness.
- 102 On 12 March, there was a further interaction with police at Central Railway Station. Blake said he had thoughts of self-harm. He said to the police officer, *"Blow my fucking brains out,"* whilst his eyes were looking at the firearm. He reportedly subsequently said, *"Bad things happen to people I live with. I used to live with my partner. Not around here, further out. We got quite close, but I did something very bad one night and well, he died from it."* When asked what he meant, Blake said, *"I got the drugs,"* before shifting to another topic. Subsequently, he said, *"It was all my fault he died. I did something very bad to him. Bad things happen to people around me."*

ISSUES

- 103 As previously referred to, the focus of the oral evidence was to determine what weight could be given to the various statements and actions of Blake in relation to Ivan's death and to determine if any further light could be shed on the manner or circumstances of Ivan's death.
- 104 Firstly, it must be observed that no weight can be placed upon anything Blake said whilst an inpatient in a mental health ward. This is of most relevance in relation to Blake's time in Nepean Hospital from 13 December 2023 and his subsequent time in the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in 2024.
- 105 As Dr Ellis pointed out, people who suffer psychotic episodes often have very poor recall. They have difficulty in relation to sequencing and dates and timing and locations. They sense things that are not there. They believe things that are not true. They ruminate whilst the psychosis subsequently improves. This can override memory and impact fidelity of reporting. As the foregoing indicates, the reports confirm Blake's psychosis whilst hospitalised.
- 106 Dr Ellis was specifically asked re Blake's comments on 12 January 2024. The question posed was: *"With regard to Mr Coull's mental health history, please provide your opinion as to the potential reliability of comments/admissions made by Mr Coull in relation to Mr Spudic's death and his retractions of those admissions."*
- 107 Dr Ellis answered: *"His history and likely mental state at the time render any admission, general comment or retraction he made on 12 January 2024 unreliable. As noted, he has generally low cognitive function made worse by emotionally charged situations and intoxication. The situation was emotionally charged in that he was interacting with police whom he had historical conflict with. His sexual partner and perceived support was dead and he was using substances. Therefore, his changing narrative, poor sequencing of events and emotional displays during the questioning are consistent with his underlying and active mental disorders. He may have had some lower grade symptoms of psychosis contributing, however on the available material this is not obvious and less likely."*
- 108 That opinion was confirmed in the doctor's oral evidence.
- 109 In Blake's known interactions around the time of and following Ivan's death, he was either significantly affected by drugs or in a hospital mental health ward.

- 110 I am of the view no weight can be placed on any admissions made by Blake around that period of time.
- 111 Counsel assisting in his opening identified as an issue for consideration whether Blake may have returned to the residence before or after Ivan's death, but before Ivan was discovered deceased on 13 December 2023.
- 112 As the chronology previously referred to in relation to Blake's movements revealed, on 8 December, after being found slumped against a wall unresponsive, Blake was taken to Blacktown Hospital at 9pm. He self-discharged at 11.30pm. It is to be noted that Ivan was seen sitting on his back steps at around that same time.
- 113 The next morning, 9 December, Blake was seen by police at Penrith Railway Station heading what he said to be "home at Mount Druitt."
- 114 Blake attended and picked up his methadone on 9, 10, 11 and 12 December. On 13 December at 9.30pm he was taken to Nepean Hospital after being found delirious and unaware of his surroundings. Beyond that, nothing is known of Blake's movements over 9, 10, 11 and the first part of 12 December. I have already indicated I am satisfied Ivan was deceased when Mr Gentle attended about midday on 12 December.
- 115 Blake gave evidence at inquest. He indicated he resides in Western Sydney in share accommodation. He was not in employment, but he was currently well medicated and said he had been sober for eight months. He was unclear on the detail of when he first met Ivan, although that is not of any great moment. He indicated that very quickly after meeting they commenced their intimate relationship. He confirmed he met Ivan's mother and sister. He saw Ivan's mother and sister at Ivan's place. He said he and Ivan frequented Ivan's mother's place, and he indicated that Ivan's mother lived with them for a couple of months. He confirmed, as I have earlier pointed out, that on occasions they would each buy methadone off the street. He confirmed he would purchase Xanax, alcohol, weed and consume it in substantial quantities.
- 116 Parts of Blake's evidence struck me as particularly frank. For example, he said his relationship with Ivan had its ups and downs. They would argue a lot and towards the end, they were arguing more than usual and ultimately always arguing, normally about drugs and money. He conceded they had been physical to each other at times. He conceded he probably caused a black eye to Ivan but indicated he did not know where

scratches had come from. It was brought to his attention that it had been reported that he had choked Ivan on an occasion. He said that was true. He said they were arguing and he put Ivan in a headlock and was choking him but let him go. He was asked if Ivan lost consciousness. He said, "*No, of course not.*" He indicated they then hugged it out on the couch. He referred to his own memory as being shot. He agreed he returned to Ivan's premises on or about 15 January, noting he wanted to feel Ivan's energy. He observed everything to be gone but for a shirt. He said he picked it up and smelt it. Whilst he was frankly admitting he had attended the premises, I consider it unlikely, given a second forensic examination had taken place the previous day, that one of Ivan's shirts was there on 15 January. He indicated he cried a bit and then left.

- 117 Blake was asked as to his last memory of Ivan and initially said he could not recall and then referred to a verbal argument and he then leaving the premises. He had no idea what the argument was about, but it was probably about drugs.
- 118 He was asked where he was living when he found out about Ivan's passing. He said he was couch surfing in the Tregear/Mount Druitt area. He then asserted to have extensive connection to the Mount Druitt area, essentially in relation to seeking drugs.
- 119 He was asked about Ivan's death. He denied any involvement saying he believed it was possible Ivan had overdosed. When asked about when he found out about Ivan's death he asserted he found out before he was hospitalised, saying that prior to that admission on 13 December he had been told by a friend on the street known to him as "D", that Ivan was dead as a result of an overdose.
- 120 He said he could only remember bits and pieces of that interaction with D. He recalled walking away and crying after seeing D prior to going and getting his methadone. He indicated he believed D and he thought it was feasible that Ivan had overdosed given his observations of Ivan's consumption of methadone, alcohol and on occasion other drugs.
- 121 He said he felt guilt in relation to Ivan's death. He said what if he went back and had a conversation with Ivan, he would still be alive. At times, he felt that he wanted to be punished for Ivan's death.
- 122 Whilst accepting Blake's frankness on some issues, overall, I find his recall to be completely unreliable. That unreliability is explained significantly by the evidence of Dr

Ellis. It emanates from his conditions and his lifestyle. In Blake's own words, his memory is shot. As such, I can place no reliance on Blake's accounts as to events surrounding Ivan's death and any specifics including he and Ivan having an argument and Blake leaving. There is, however, no evidence of Blake being at Ivan's house at any time between when Ivan was last seen alive on the night of 8 December and when Mr Gentle attended Ivan's place on 12 December.

- 123 There are also other aspects of the evidence, including statements by Ivan prior to his death, that tend to suggest it had been some days since Blake had been at Ivan's house as at 8 December 2023.
- 124 Ultimately, no further light has been shed on the circumstances of Ivan's death through the evidence of Mr Blake Coull. In addition, I am satisfied, as I have expressed, that no weight can be placed on any of Blake's admissions.

Recommendations pursuant to section 82 Coroners Act 2009

- 125 There is no need to make any recommendation arising from the circumstances of Ivan's death.

Findings under section 81(1) of the Coroners Act 2009 (NSW):

- 126 As I have indicated, it is not possible to determine whether it is more likely that Ivan died from an overdose or natural causes. As such, the manner and cause of Ivan's death remain unascertained.
- 127 Having considered all the evidence, the findings I make under section 81(1) of the Coroners Act 2009 (NSW) are:

Identity

The person who died was Ivan Spudic.

Date of death

Between 11.30pm on 8 December 2023 and midday on 12 December 2023.

Place of death

Tregear, NSW

Cause of death

Unascertained

Manner of death

Unascertained

Conclusion

128 On behalf of the Coroners Court of New South Wales, I offer my sincere and respectful condolences to the family, extended family, friends and associates of Ivan.

129 I thank the officer-in-charge of the coronial investigation, Detective Senior Constable Maloney, for her efforts in the coronial investigation and work in compiling the police brief of evidence. I am satisfied the investigation has been of a high standard and completely thorough. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Detective Sergeant Rinehart for his assistance in the latter stages of the coronial investigation once Detective Senior Constable Maloney went on leave.

130 I acknowledge and express my gratitude to the assisting team, Mr Chris McGorey of counsel and Ms Elizabeth Blomfeld of the CSO, for their invaluable, committed

assistance. Others from the CSO had previously assisted and my thanks are extended to them also.

131 I close this inquest.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David O'Neil". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot above the 'i' in David and a small dot above the 'i' in Neil.

Judge David O'Neil
Deputy State Coroner
Coroner's Court of New South Wales
13 October 2026