

Northern Territory

DARWIN CONVENTION CENTRE

4 November 2024

Australian
of the Year
▶ Awards

Reflect. Respect. Celebrate

20
25

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF MINISTER

Territorians are incredibly proud of the place they call home. It holds a special place in our heart, and we love the Territory like it is an extension of ourselves. Which means it doesn't take much searching to find a great Territorian. In fact, they're everywhere and all around, working hard to make the place we call home an even better place for everyone.

However, the Northern Territory Australian of the Year Awards celebrate the very best. Those shining lights who go above and beyond for a cause close to their heart or to lend a hand to someone in need who rightly make this esteemed list.

Whether in health, leadership, first nations or charity, the finalists in Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year and Australia's Local Hero have dedicated years to our community and this recognition of courage, selflessness and compassion is well deserved.

This year's finalists are a diverse group of incredible people who do the Territory proud each and every day. From the red centre to the humid Top End and everywhere in between, they are a true reflection of what it means to be a Territorian.

I look forward to celebrating the achievements of the extraordinary Territorians being recognised tonight.

Your friends and family are proud of your achievements and tonight we recognise your powerful contribution as a Territory.

The Honourable Lia Finocchiaro
Chief Minister
Northern Territory



20
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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the 2025 Northern Territory Australian of the Year Awards!

Tonight, we gather to honour 16 extraordinary Territorians who embody the spirit of our community through their selfless contributions.

From North East Arnhemland to Central Australia, these inspiring individuals showcase remarkable courage, creativity, and compassion, making the Northern Territory a better place to live.

As we celebrate their achievements, we also celebrate the power of community, courage and selflessness. Each nominee has touched lives and created change, proving that one person can indeed make a difference.

Tonight we would also like to recognise the people who nominated these individuals; thank you for nominating.

Richard Fejo

Dr Richard Fejo
Chair
Australia Day Council
Northern Territory



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THE AWARDS PROCESS



1

If all starts with your nomination



2

An expert panel selects one state and territory recipient in each of the four award categories



4

The National Australia Day Council Board selects the national recipients



3

The state and territory recipients are awarded and go through to the national judging process



5

The four national recipients are awarded on Australia Day eve in Canberra

Want more information?

Visit the Australian of the Year Awards website australianoftheyear.org.au for the latest news and profiles of nominees, recipients and alumni

For information on Australia Day and the National Australia Day Council, visit australiaday.org.au

NOMINATE NOW



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware this program may contain images or names of people who have passed away

If our nominee stories have brought anything up for you or you're concerned someone you know is at risk, please reach out to:
Lifeline on 13 11 14
Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636 or
13YARN, a crisis line for Indigenous Australians



DONNA AH CHEE

Indigenous health champion

Donna Ah Chee is a proud Bundjalung woman and national advocate for health and social justice for Aboriginal communities. From 2012 she has been the CEO of the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress.

Donna's work has included life-changing initiatives to support Aboriginal children. Neuropsychologists are made available to young people. Young mothers can access home visiting nurses. And children are helped in preparing for preschool.

In 2023, Donna advocated for restrictions on alcohol availability and action on social determinants of destructive drinking in Alice Springs. This led to government restrictions on alcohol and \$250 million in funding to address alcohol misuse. The restrictions led to a 40 per cent reduction in alcohol related domestic violence incidents in Alice Springs, along with a significant investment in education and remote housing across the Northern Territory.

In 2022, Donna received an Honorary Doctorate from Charles Darwin University for her contribution to the health of First Nations peoples.



FRANCK GOHIER

Printmaker, painter, sculptor and artist

Franck Gohier is a nationally recognised printmaker, painter, sculptor and artist who has impacted the lives of Indigenous artists in numerous communities throughout Arnhem Land, Central Australia, the Tiwi Islands and the Kimberley.

In 1996, he established an art program at Berrimah Prison with the Northern Territory Correctional Services and 24HR Art. Run under the Ending Offending program, select Indigenous inmates were taught art skills by guest Indigenous elders both as therapy and skill building for life. The program's success led to a similar initiative at Alice Springs Prison.

The same year Franck founded Red Hand Prints, teaching Aboriginal artists printmaking and collaborating on limited edition prints and projects. It's given local artists the opportunity to express their culture and stories through printmaking and offered economic development opportunities.

Franck's works are featured in multiple galleries including the National Gallery of Australia, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, and Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.



ZAINAB MOHAMUD

Football and diversity advocate

Zainab Mohamud is using sport as a catalyst for positive change, uniting refugees, asylum seekers and new immigrants through the power of football.

As a passionate advocate for culturally and linguistically diverse communities, she founded the Football Without Borders (FWB) Black Panthers football team after recognising the barriers that prevented many women from participating in sports. Under her leadership, female participation surged from 12 players to over eight teams participating in community tournaments, while her collaborations with organisations such as Football Northern Territory expanded opportunities for youth and diverse age groups.

With over 15 years involvement in community, Zainab championed inclusion initiatives being a part of FWB and has made a profound impact: the Refugee World Cup 2024 tournament had more than 400 participants.

As the first ever chair for the Northern Territory's United Nations Association of Australia - Young Professionals Network, Zainab aspires to empower future generations, fostering inclusivity and resilience through sport.



GRANT NGULMIYA NUNDHIRRIBALA

Musician, role model and cultural leader

Internationally recognised, Grant Ngulmiya Nundhirribala is a musician and cultural leader in Numbulwar community, Arnhem Land.

Grant has inspired Numbulwar's next generation to excel at performing their traditional music and dance. He's shown how Numbulwar people can make an income from expressing their internationally esteemed culture, in a place where employment is scarce.

Bridging cultural differences, Grant has been an ambassador for his music, language and culture across the world. He collaborated with the Budapest Art Orchestra to release an award-winning album and worked in Japan with North Indian classical artists. He's travelled to Ubud, Bali to collaborate with a Balinese Gamelan and recorded an album with a Spanish guitarist in Barcelona.

Grant was the driving force behind the three-day Numburindi Festival in Numbulwar. He regularly performs at Garma Festival and took 45 Numbulwar artists to the Barunga Festival two years in a row. And for decades, he's led the renowned Red Flag Dancers.



GEORGINA BRACKEN

Community changemaker

Georgina Bracken is passionate about social justice, community safety and human dignity.

As the first manager of the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Cultural Centre, Georgina supports cultural preservation and the proliferation of local visual and performing arts, promoting cross-cultural understanding.

The former CEO of Tennant Creek Women's Refuge has provided critical support for victims of domestic violence for a decade. She's now a board member still advocating for the most vulnerable members of the community.

Until recently, Georgina coordinated Tennant Creek Transport, a transport service she founded that addressed disadvantage – often driving the buses herself.

Georgina has served on many boards over the past 25 years, including the Barkly Region Alcohol and Drug Abuse Advisory Group Board, the NT Shelter Board and the Barkly Regional Arts Board.

She currently sits on the governance table for the Barkly Regional Deal, improving the productivity and liveability of the region, as a representative of the NGO and community sector.



MICHAEL FOLEY OAM

Community volunteer and founder, Seniors Of Excellence NT

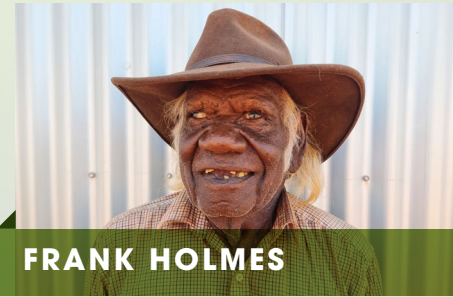
For more than 40 years, Michael Foley OAM has been contributing to the recognition of senior citizens in our communities and their mental wellbeing.

Michael saw a need for seniors to be acknowledged for the hours of volunteer work they do every day. In 2014, he founded Seniors Of Excellence NT, inspiring senior citizens to share their valuable expertise and see the value of achievement that comes through community service.

He went on to establish the Seniors Of Excellence NT Award to recognise their selfless work, with 183 seniors receiving the award since 2014.

Michael has raised thousands of dollars and volunteered countless hours for community organisations such as Cancer Care NT, Variety and Royal Darwin Hospital Palliative Care Hospice. He's also served on the board of directors of the National Heart Foundation Australia (Northern Territory).

At 84 years of age, Michael continues to ensure the contributions of seniors are not forgotten.



FRANK HOLMES

Alyawarr knowledge-keeper and advocate

Dedicating decades of his life to being an interpreter of two worlds, Frank Holmes has made a profound contribution to the preservation and transmission of Alyawarr cultural knowledge.

The many songs, dances, ceremonies and marks memorised and transmitted by Frank convey maps across vast swathes of northern Australia and core knowledge of Aboriginal genealogy, law, spirituality and Alyawarr land tenure.

As a well-respected leader and senior knowledge holder, Frank frequently travels hundreds of kilometres to attend Central Land Council meetings. He has lent his expertise to decision making about the use of land and the rights of Indigenous traditional owners, leading to many successful native title land claims.

With his brothers Casey Holmes and Donald Stewart, he is also changing the lives of Indigenous men as part of the Codes 4 Life program, supporting and mentoring them to find strength in their cultural responsibilities, family connections and the teamwork essential to community wellbeing.



JENNIFER MESSELL

Registered nurse and aged care facilities manager

Jennifer Messell provides a haven for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their latter years at the Juninga Centre. She cares for residents and their families through sickness – often to the end of their lives.

For over 30 years, Jennifer has actively promoted quality, culturally sensitive aged care to vulnerable Indigenous people. She has built intimate connections through listening to their unique stories, seeking to meet their emotional, cultural and spiritual needs.

Jennifer also supports her staff to develop their skills and fulfil their potential, particularly Indigenous employees – successfully retaining some staff for over 20 years.

Jennifer has been celebrated for her nursing excellence, commitment and for being a role model for the values of respect and diversity. She was named Territory Nurse/Midwife of the Year in the 2019 Northern Territory Nursing and Midwifery Excellence Awards, and in 2023 she was a runner-up in the Excellence in Aged Care Nursing category.



NILESH DILUSHAN

Community service leader

Nileshe (Nil) Dilushan inspires and unites young people from diverse backgrounds to serve their community. As co-founder of two not-for-profit organisations, he fosters youth-driven initiatives for social change.

Nil's commitment to community service has led him to spearhead two successful community initiatives: The Kindness Shake and Rotaract Young Professionals NT. These organisations focus on upskilling young people, addressing literacy gaps and creating employment pathways, making a positive impact on their local communities.

Their programs, such as FINSMART and Jumpstart, are making a difference by closing service gaps and providing young people with essential peer-to-peer support in financial literacy and substance abuse awareness.

In 2023, Nil won Northern Territory Volunteer of the Year and the Chief Minister's Youth Volunteer of the Year. From an immigrant grappling with cultural displacement and language barriers to a community leader inspiring a new generation, his journey embodies the Territory's multicultural spirit.



JULES GABOR

Youth advocate

At 19 years old, Jules Gabor has established herself as a fearless advocate for young people in Darwin, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to addressing the issues that matter most to her peers.

Named 2024 Darwin Young Citizen of the Year, Jules represents the Northern Territory on a national scale as a UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador. She served as vice-chair of the 2023 NT Youth Round Table, was a member of the first-ever Department of Education's NT Youth Voice Peak Group and the City of Darwin Youth Advisory Committee, working to represent youth interests at the local government level.

A voice for equal opportunity, particularly for marginalised groups, Jules is developing a podcast series, *Heart to Heart: Stories Unleashed*, supported by social enterprise Pathfinders NT and the Northern Territory Government. Through this, she aims to further amplify the voices of young people, particularly on youth homelessness, identity and mental health – fostering a sense of community and belonging.



CARLITO RODRIGUES

Athlete and co-founder, One Percent Program

Carlito (Dante) Rodrigues is a professional athlete and entrepreneur from Darwin. He is a proud Aboriginal Tiwi/Portuguese man who has used his influence from professional sports to promote mental health and suicide prevention.

Dante has started multiple programs internationally and locally to help misguided and underprivileged youth, most notably the One Percent Program. The initiative builds self-worth and brings young men together for fitness training and meaningful conversation.

A professional kickboxer, Dante represented Australia at the WAKO World Championships on two separate occasions in Italy in 2018 (winning a silver medal) and Portugal in 2023. He was the first Aboriginal and first Territorian kickboxer to represent Australia and the first to win a medal.

Dante, currently Australian light-middleweight champion and a five-time state Muay Thai champion, was recently chosen as the 2024 National NAIDOC Youth of the Year and a state NAIDOC Youth and Sports Person of the Year.



MELISSA WURRAMARRBA

Indigenous education trailblazer and advocate

Melissa Wurrumarrba was the first person in her community to graduate from university in 36 years when she attained her Bachelor of Arts (Education) degree from Macquarie University in 2023.

A trailblazing Alawa woman, Melissa defied the odds. And through her work for the Child and Family Services section of the Yugul Mangi Development Aboriginal Corporation, she's now working tirelessly to give other young people the same opportunity.

In addition to passionately advocating for education, health and cultural preservation, Melissa is striving to address the root causes of low school attendance. Knowing the transformative power of education firsthand, Melissa's aspiration is for Ngukurr School to achieve 95 per cent attendance.

A natural leader, Melissa also serves on the Yugul Mangi Development Aboriginal Corporation Board and energetically captains the Ngukurr Bulldogs Women's Australian Football League team.

In role modelling resilience and showing what's possible, Melissa offers guidance and inspires hope for Indigenous youth.



YVETTE CLARKE

Sepsis prevention ambassador

As president of the T for Thomas charity, Yvette Clarke's tireless mission is to educate everyday Australians about the dangers of sepsis. Each year, at least 55,000 Australians develop sepsis and 8,700 die from related complications.

Sepsis death and harm is preventable when diagnosed early, and medical care and antibiotics are provided quickly. This is the message that Yvette is working hard to get out among the general Northern Territory community and, more specifically, within Indigenous communities where the risk of sepsis is higher.

Since 2017, she has been passionately leading a group of rural ladies to raise funds and promote awareness of sepsis. In addition to public advocacy, Yvette educates healthcare workers on early recognition through her presentations at hospitals and healthcare providers across the Territory.

Yvette also allies with community and sporting events to get the word out. Her vision is that no Australian would be harmed by sepsis.



MANDAKA MARIKA

Indigenous community and land conservation advocate

Mandaka (Sam) Marika, a Rirratjingu man from North-East Arnhem Land, stands as a leader in sustainable, cultural land practices.

Chosen by his Rirratjingu clan to be one of the first rangers in 1992, Sam has led the management of Indigenous protected areas and delivered sustainable land management outcomes for traditional owners for over 30 years.

Concerned about plastic debris from foreign fishing activity washing up on beaches across northern Australia, Mandaka worked with Sea Shepherd on their marine debris campaign.

And together with other prominent community men, Mandaka in 2004 initiated the Larrpan foot patrol to help combat the rise in community violence, break-ins, anti-social behaviour and volatile substance abuse.

In 2023, he served as chairman of Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation, and in 2020 won the Lifetime Achievement Award – Territory National Resource Management. The same year, Mandaka was awarded the Australia Day Citizen of the Year Award – Nhulunbuy 2020.



MIGNON MCHENDRIE

Wildlife carer and advocate

For over 30 years, Mignon McHendrie has brought compassion and education to her community, rescuing and caring for the Northern Territory's unique wildlife.

As head of the community organisation, Wildcare Incorporated, Mignon is at the helm of a team of volunteers who rescue wildlife. She also donates her time to working with remote communities, including organising for animals to be flown to Darwin for specialised care.

As a volunteer, the wildlife warrior shoulders a large responsibility: applying for government grants, managing finances, recruiting and coordinating volunteers for rescues and facilitating board meetings. Organising fundraising events and managing public relations is also part of her considerable remit.

Mignon is expanding the work of Wildcare Incorporated by training the community on how to care for orphaned baby animals and licenses the taking of animals with carers into local schools. A true advocate for Australia's treasured wildlife, Mignon's kindness and compassion are contagious.



GAYLENE YENHU GURRUWIWI

Co-founder, Galiwin'ku Women's Space

Gaylene Yenhu Gurruwiwi is an inspirational community leader in one of the most vulnerable and remote places in Australia – Galiwinku, East Arnhem Land. Her steely determination in securing funding and establishing the Galiwin'ku Women's Space has transformed it from a vision into a sanctuary where women can find safety, support and empowerment.

In 2018, Gaylene attended the COAG National Summit on reducing violence against women and their children. She then visited Parliament House in Canberra to talk to the former attorney general about domestic violence support-service delivery and the importance of needs-based funding in remote communities.

At the launch of the historic Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute for First Nations Gender Justice in 2023, Gaylene played a crucial role in discussions to bring sustained, meaningful change for Aboriginal and Indigenous communities.

Since then, Gaylene has worked to bring together 120 Indigenous women from 12 communities in Darwin, fostering long-lasting change and collaboration

THE TROPHIES

The Australian National University (ANU) is committed to better outcomes for our community, the environment, our nation and the world. As the national university, we feel immensely privileged to be the exclusive cultural partner of the 2025 Australian of the Year Awards, recognising the outstanding service to the community that many Australians make.

The trophies for the 2025 Australian of the Year Awards are the stunning result of a collaborative effort by staff and students of the Glass Workshop in the ANU School of Art & Design.

The geometric nature of the design aims to represent the multiple facets that have shaped Australian society, embodying a nation that is confident in its leadership, contemporary in its outlook and distinguished by its diverse community. The facets also capture the points of the Southern Cross, the star of federation, and are rendered in a brilliant blue symbolising the Australian sky.

Each award has been created through a process of cast glass, and meticulously ground and polished by hand. The awards have been a wonderful project for students to apply their creative and technical skills to complete a professional commission.

ANU School of Music students have also contributed theme music for the Australian of the Year Awards, which will be used throughout the state and territory announcements.



RECOGNISING NT'S FINEST

Since 1960, the Australian of the Year Awards have recognised people from all across the country and from all fields of endeavour. This is just a snapshot of the recipients from the Northern Territory for the past five years. The full honour roll can be viewed at australianoftheyear.org.au

Australian of the Year

- 2024** Blair McFarland – Founder, Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service
- 2023** S Bush-Blanasi - In Memoriam – Chair, Northern Land Council
- 2022** Leanne Liddle - Director of the Aboriginal Justice Unit
- 2021** Dr Wendy Page - Global expert in Aboriginal health
- 2020** Dr Geoffrey Thompson AM - Sports physician and ex-RAAF flying doctor

Senior Australian of the Year

- 2024** Yalmay Yunupingu – Teacher, linguist and community leader
- 2023** Bernard Tipiloura – Suicide prevention campaigner
- 2022** Robyne Burridge OAM - Disability services advocate and Founder of Focus-A-Bility
- 2021** Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann AM - Aboriginal activist, educator and artist
- 2020** Dr B Marika AO - In Memoriam - Artist, cultural activist and environmental adviser

Young Australian of the Year

- 2024** Peter Susanto – Medical student and community volunteer
- 2023** Jahdai Vigona – First Nations community leader
- 2022** Sizolwenkosi Fuyana - Businesswoman, podcaster and youth advocate
- 2021** Stuart McGrath - Aboriginal health practitioner
- 2019** Danzal Baker OAM - Rapper and dancer

Australia's Local Hero

- 2024** Witiyana Marika – Musician and filmmaker
- 2023** Sacha King – Social worker and founder, Two Two One Mental Health Charity
- 2022** Rebecca Forrest - Event organiser and fundraiser
- 2021** Sergeant Erica Gibson - Police officer and safer communities advocate
- 2020** Shirleen Campbell - Family and domestic violence advocate

* Names and post nominals of recipients in the Honour Roll are a reflection of the time they received the Award.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



Australian Government
Department of Health
and Aged Care



Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs



The Canberra Times
part of the ACM network



Australian
National
University



MinterEllison



The National Australia Day Council acknowledges and pays its respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and recognises their continuous connection to country, community and culture.

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