

MEDIA RELEASE

THURSDAY 31 OCTOBER 2024

**2025 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS
NOMINEES FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA ANNOUNCED**

A man making football for children more inclusive, a microbiologist solving antibiotic resistance, an Olympic pole vaulter, a woman dedicated to helping others through therapeutic horse riding, an Indigenous business leader and a young man ensuring education for everyone are just some of the nominees for the 2025 Australian of the Year Awards for Western Australia.

The 2025 award nominees are:

2025 Australian of the Year for Western Australia

Kim Collard - Founder, Kulbardi, Kooya Australia Fleet Services and Bibbulmun Fund (Perth)
Dianne and Ian Haggerty - Agriculture pioneers (Mollerin)
Dr Kieran Mulroneo - Inventor and applied microbiologist (Coodanup)
Professor Britta Regli-von Ungern-Sternberg - Paediatric anaesthetist (Subiaco)

2025 Senior Australian of the Year for Western Australia

Professor Patricia Dudgeon AM - Mental healthcare advocate (St James)
M'liss Henry OAM - Founder, Claremont Therapeutic Riding Centre (Wembley)
Angi McCluskey - Dementia care champion (Roleystone)
Brother Thomas Oliver Pickett AM - Co-founder, Wheelchairs For Kids (Perth)

2025 Young Australian of the Year for Western Australia

Jack Anderson - Co-founder, Elucidate Education (Applecross)
Shelley Cable - Accountant and advocate for First Nations economic empowerment (Mount Pleasant)
Isabella Choate - Intersectional living experience advocate (Rivervale)
Nina Kennedy - World champion and Olympic gold medallist, pole vault (Busselton)

2025 Local Hero for Western Australia

Cristiana Anca - Social entrepreneur and founder, Chris' Kitchen (Fremantle)
Jennifer Ball - Founder, Worthy Australia (Baldivis)
Rob Geersen - Founder, Starkick (Menora)
Dr Jacinta Vu - Oral medicine specialist (Como)

**see detailed bios on following pages*

The nominees for Western Australia are among 137 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The award recipients for Western Australia will be announced on the evening of Tuesday 12 November 2024 in a ceremony at Government House in Perth, which will also be available to watch online at australianoftheyear.org.au.

They will then join the other state and territory recipients as national finalists for the national awards announcement on 25 January 2025 in Canberra.

National Australia Day Council CEO Mark Fraser AO CVO congratulated the nominees for Western Australia.

“The Western Australia nominees for 2025 are all dedicated to helping others and making a difference,” said Mark.

“Across a diverse range of interests and skillsets, they are all giving back, creating opportunities or breaking ground which impacts others in positive, often life changing ways.”

ENDS.

Nominee [bios on the following pages](#) and can also be viewed from australianoftheyear.org.au.

Nominee [photos can be downloaded](#) from this link (note – all photos have been supplied by nominees): [Western Australia Nominee Photos](#)

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2025 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Kim Collard

Founder, Kulbardi, Kooya Australia Fleet Services and Bibbulmun Fund

Kim Collard, a proud Balladong-Whadjuk man of the Noongar Nation, is the visionary behind two of Australia’s most successful Indigenous-owned businesses: Kulbardi, a national office supplies provider, and Kooya Australia Fleet Services. Under Kim’s leadership, these businesses have flourished on a national scale, creating employment opportunities for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

A passionate advocate for Indigenous self-determination, Kim also established the Bibbulmun Fund, dedicating five percent of his companies' profits to support Aboriginal-led initiatives. Since 2014, the fund has raised over \$1.6 million, supporting 24 charitable organisations and thousands of individuals across Australia.

With a career spanning over three decades, Kim has mentored Indigenous youth and played a key role in supporting emerging Aboriginal businesses. He collaborates with government and private sectors, championing Indigenous rights, economic empowerment and intercultural understanding.

About to turn 66, Kim’s unwavering commitment to social and economic progress has left an indelible mark on First Nations communities across the country.

Dianne and Ian Haggerty

Agriculture pioneers

Dianne and Ian Haggerty are passionate about restoring landscape ecology, producing optimum health promoting food, fibre and beverage while supporting planetary health outcomes.

With the foundation of Natural Intelligence Farming (NIF), Dianne and Ian pioneered a modern farming practise focused on supporting diverse microbiomes in soil, plant, and animals – boosting immune system function, nutrient diversity and resilience.

NIF places trust and appreciation in the wisdom of natural systems, enabling them to replace synthetic fertilisers with natural fertility processes, such as plant diversity, compost extract, worm liquids and the microbiome of ruminant livestock.

In very dry and poor soil conditions, they've pioneered a farming approach that optimises water use and rebuilds soils, biodiversity and landscape function.

Working with 26,000 hectares, Dianne (58) and Ian (59) have demonstrated viability at scale. Their world leading approach has attracted global recognition, with Dianne invited to present at Australian and international conferences supporting other farmers in their own journey.

Dr Kieran Mulroney

Inventor and applied microbiologist

Dr Kieran Mulroney, a research microbiologist and CEO of Cytophenix, is on a mission to solve the problem of antibiotic resistance.

More than 1.29 million people globally die each year from antibiotic-resistant infections. Another 4.5 million die indirectly from conditions caused by antibiotic-resistant infections. It's a dire public health problem that's worsening rapidly due to our overuse of antibiotics.

Kieran led a research team to find a viable solution to the global antibiotic resistance problem. His team developed FloCAST™: sophisticated research equipment that measures hundreds of thousands of individual bacteria in seconds. This AI-driven technology then predicts which antibiotics will be most effective in treating each infection with 96.9 per cent accuracy. Giving the patient the right drug early can be the difference between life and death, or serious complications like amputations.

Kieran's work will improve lives all over the world. The 40-year-old is inspiring others to keep searching for ground-breaking medical discoveries.

Professor Britta Regli-von Ungern-Sternberg

Paediatric anaesthetist

Professor Britta Regli-von Ungern-Sternberg's leading-edge work is making surgery much less traumatic for children. Paediatric anaesthesia is a high-risk speciality with the potential for significant long-lasting harm.

Britta's patient-centred research has spearheaded significant global practice changes, reducing complications and mortalities. Britta's goal is to ensure that when a child needs a vital operation, it's as safe and pain-free as possible.

Britta's research aims to prevent respiratory complications, evaluate different airway devices, better control pain and understand the impact of anaesthesia in early life on a child's neurodevelopment. She is relentlessly discovering unique solutions that improve the lives of children undergoing surgery – garnering much international recognition.

Britta has built a vibrant multi-disciplinary team in Western Australia, creating a hub for paediatric anaesthesia research. She also mentors dozens of junior researchers.

Britta, 49, is the first and only chair of paediatric anaesthesia in Australasia and leads the newly founded Institute for Paediatric Perioperative Excellence.

2025 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Professor Patricia Dudgeon AM

Mental healthcare advocate

Professor Patricia (Pat) Dudgeon AM, from the Bardi of the Kimberley, is Australia's first Aboriginal psychologist and a leader in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing.

Pat is currently the director of the Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention at the University of Western Australia, also leading the Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing research project.

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Pioneer Pat led the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project and the Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project, which promotes the development of culturally appropriate psychology services and the training of Indigenous psychologists.

At 65, she is also a founding board member of Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia, the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention. Pat's groundbreaking work is reshaping psychology and creating tangible change.

M'liss Henry OAM

Founder, Claremont Therapeutic Riding Centre

When M'liss Henry OAM founded Claremont Therapeutic Riding Centre (CTRC) in 1972 with just two riders, it was the first horse riding centre for people with disabilities in Western Australia.

Today, CTRC offers confidence-building recreation and therapeutic riding lessons to over 160 riders per week, working with people with a wide variety of abilities and disabilities. It has become a second home for its community of riders, staff and some 60 volunteers.

M'liss has coached nationally and internationally with Riding for the Disabled Association of Australia, Special Olympic and Paralympic riders. In 2008, she was awarded an Order of Australia Medal and inducted into the WA Women's Hall of Fame in 2019. She was also Equestrian WA Para Coach of the Year in 2021-2022.

After 52 years, 81-year-old M'liss still has the same passion for breaking down societal barriers and supporting riders to strive for their goals, no matter how small.

Angi McCluskey

Dementia care champion

Following her husband's dementia diagnosis in 2015, Angi McCluskey saw an opportunity to create community connections.

Angi launched the first Forget-Me-Not memory cafe in 2017 for people living with dementia, their family and carers. Forget-Me-Not cafes encourage people with dementia and their carers to enjoy a social atmosphere with others who are travelling down the same road – without fear of embarrassment or judgement.

Forget-Me-Not cafes have grown from just a couple of attendees at the first location to now welcoming up to 30 people each month in 30 locations across Western Australia. The cafe meetups are organised by a team of volunteers with the support of local governments and venue owners.

Since 2018, 73-year-old Angi has served as carer representative on the Fremantle and Fiona Stanley Hospitals Consumer Advisory Councils and on the Alzheimer's WA Consumer Advisory Committee. In 2019, Angi received the WA Senior of the Year: Metropolitan Award.

Brother Thomas Oliver Pickett AM

Co-founder, Wheelchairs For Kids

Brother Thomas Oliver (Olly) Pickett AM co-founded Wheelchairs For Kids in 1996 to provide adjustable wheelchairs and occupational therapy expertise for children in developing countries, free of charge.

Since then, more than 60,000 custom-built wheelchairs have been gifted to children in over 80 countries. With over 250 retiree workshop volunteers, Wheelchairs For Kids is one of Western Australia's largest (and with an average age of 74, one of Australia's oldest) volunteer-led charities. A further 550 people from aged care and community groups sew covers for wheelchair soft supports, and crochet rugs and soft toys.

Olly also spearheaded the development of an innovative, low-cost wheelchair design to World Health Organization standards that grows as the children do – a world first. Wheelchairs For Kids is just one way that Olly has improved the lives of others. For 26 continuous years, 83-year-old Olly's life-changing community service has ignited a ripple effect of kindness and generosity.

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2025 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Jack Anderson

Co-founder, Elucidate Education

At the age of 24, the extent of Jack Anderson's achievements in the education space and beyond are impressive. He is a keynote speaker, documentary maker, author and a Harvard University Teaching Fellow and scholarship recipient, through which he is pursuing a Master of Education.

Jack founded ThrivEd when he was only 18. The student-run charity produced educational materials and donated them to disadvantaged schools. ThrivEd later merged with another charity to become Elucidate Education, encompassing some 70 volunteers and expanding its reach to tens of thousands of students in Australia and globally.

Jack has led the publication of many textbooks for senior study and coordinates regular trips to remote areas of Western Australia, donating educational materials to the most socio-economically disadvantaged, rural and Indigenous students, empowering them for success.

Through Elucidate Education and a range of other philanthropic initiatives, Jack passionately pursues greater equity and educational access in Australia and beyond.

Shelley Cable

Accountant and advocate for First Nations economic empowerment

Shelley Cable is a proud Nyoongar who's passionate about using business and finance to unleash the potential of First Nations.

Shelley became one of less than 100 First Nations qualified accountants in 2020, before her appointment as CEO of charity Generation One (Minderoo Foundation). There she led the development of the *Australian Indigenous Employment Index*, Australia's most comprehensive research into First Nations employment at Australia's largest workplaces to date; and entrepreneurship program *Dream Venture*, which provided over 200 First Nations entrepreneurs with business education and over \$300,000 in investment.

Shelley was appointed to the Australian Government's Women's Economic Equality Taskforce, providing advice on the many issues and opportunities facing young and First Nations women in the Australian economy.

She has also presented to the United Nations on the financial rights of Indigenous peoples. Today, 29-year-old Shelley is heading up ANZ's inaugural First Nations strategy, opening pathways for First Nations people to thrive.

Isabella Choate

Intersectional living experience advocate

Isabella Choate is an accomplished lived experience advocate across the youth disability, mental health and LGBTQIA+ areas.

Utilising their living experience and passion for community building, Isabella has created meaningful spaces and founded Perth's first Disability Pride Festival in 2024. They strive to empower young people to channel their own experiences into action and change. Isabella serves on numerous councils and boards, including as co-chair of the North Metro Mental Health Advisory Council, advisor to RTRFM's Disability Inclusion Advisory Group, and Youth Council member of Children and Young People with Disability Australia.

At 25, they are the interim CEO of the Youth Disability Advocacy Network.

Through their diverse work as a consultant, keynote speaker, podcast host and political activist, Isabella works to identify and combat ableism and other forms of discrimination wherever they might occur, driven by a passion for creating a more accessible and equal society for all.

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Nina Kennedy

World champion and Olympic gold medallist, pole vault

Nina Kennedy personifies the Australian spirit of resilience, particularly through her impressive sporting achievements. Beginning pole vault at age 12, Nina competed in the Australian Championships at age 14 and soon after qualified for the World Championships in 2015 and 2017.

Her promising career was plagued by interruptions in the following years, including several serious injuries. Despite two stress fractures in her spine in 2022 and 2023, Nina demonstrated admirable resilience and grit.

She returned to training and recorded several personal best jumps, including sharing gold with American rival Katie Moon at the 2022 World Championships. Continuing her winning streak, Nina then won gold at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Now 27, Nina generously gives back to her community, frequently attending Little Athletics training sessions and events to share her expertise and motivate aspiring young athletes. She is a role model for young people, inspiring them with her determination and commitment to athletic excellence.

2025 LOCAL HERO FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS**Cristiana Anca**

Social entrepreneur and founder, Chris' Kitchen

Cristiana Anca is the founder of Chris' Kitchen, a social enterprise specialising in vegan and gluten-free foods for the public and wholesale. They offer catering, bespoke celebration cakes, cooking classes and other events.

Cristiana grew up in Romania and experienced the oppressive years of communist dictatorship. The 41-year-old now uses her experience to motivate and support others to not only settle, but thrive, in Australia.

Through Chris' Kitchen, she provides training and employment pathways to people experiencing disadvantage and barriers to employment, including refugees, migrants, survivors of domestic violence, people living with disability or mental health conditions and people experiencing homelessness.

She has run countless fundraisers and community events to benefit various social causes, and is passionate about ending hunger and empowering communities in Australia and worldwide. Cristiana believes in the power of food to bring people together, and that purposeful and principled business practices can improve people's lives.

Jennifer Ball

Founder, Worthy Australia

Jennifer Ball is the visionary leader and driving force behind Worthy Australia, a not-for-profit organisation providing post-crisis support to women and children who have been displaced or are experiencing homelessness because of domestic violence.

Its key initiative is their Safe Haven program, which turns empty accommodation into fully furnished, personalised homes for women and children who would otherwise be unable to leave refuges. This helps to break the cycle of domestic violence by giving families a safe place to make their home.

While trauma and violence can strip women of their dignity and self-worth, Jennifer's work helps to restore this, along with a vital sense of hope for their future and that of their children.

With a background in mental health nursing, 36-year-old Jennifer also uses her skills and experience to coordinate volunteers for Worthy Australia, fundraises and inspires others to help those most vulnerable in the community.

Rob Geersen
Founder, Starkick

Through his own family's experience, 57-year-old Robert (Rob) Geersen recognised a need for improving inclusion in sport for children living with disability. In 2015, he conceived and launched the Starkick program from his local junior AFL club.

Starkick supports children who may be unable, or unwilling, to participate in a traditional sporting environment, providing the structure and resources they require to participate, connect to community and, most importantly, have fun.

The program is helping shift societal attitudes around disability and inclusion. Since its launch, Starkick has expanded to 29 clubs across Western Australia, empowering local communities and changing the lives of many children and families along the way.

Rob's vision is that one day every child, regardless of their challenges, regardless of where they live, has the opportunity to play, and connect to community through football. In Starkick, the message is clear: "If you want to play, we'll find a way!"

Dr Jacinta Vu
Oral medicine specialist

Dr Jacinta Vu uses her considerable specialist skill in dentistry and oral health to generously give back to others.

In 2018, she was president of the Women in Dentistry Society, an organisation providing support for female dental practitioners in Western Australia. The society created Healing Smiles to assist women escaping domestic violence with their oral and dental health. It provides trauma-informed care that recognises the importance of good dental health in restoring dignity, self-esteem and confidence as victims rebuild their lives.

In 2020, Jacinta became the clinical director of the female-operated organisation, driving the substantial growth of Healing Smiles' outreach. Referrals are received from caseworkers and partner organisations to identify eligible clients. Clinicians then triage, plan and complete treatment for patients, pro bono.

With a dedicated clinic planned for Perth and regional dentists on board, Healing Smiles continues to expand its reach, driven by 44-year-old Jacinta's empathy and desire to help others.