

Victoria

THE PAVILION, ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE

8 November 2024

Australian
of the Year
▶ Awards

Reflect. Respect. Celebrate

2025



Wominjeka
THE PROGRAM

Welcome to Country

National Anthem

Governor's welcome

Premier's address

Local Hero Award category

Young Australian of the Year Award category

Senior Australian of the Year Award category

Australian of the Year Award category

MESSAGE FROM THE GOVERNOR

Victoria is a welcoming and vibrant state – thanks in no small part to the dedication of individuals like yourselves.

Our state is shaped by those who call it home, and its opportunities and capabilities depend on how we give to and work with one another.

For every nomination for Victorian Australian of the Year, there are countless other Victorians who have been uplifted by your work.

Whether you've been nominated for your volunteer service, for your profession or for a particular achievement – you are being celebrated by your community for contributions that we admire and value.

Congratulations to every nominee on this well-deserved recognition, and best wishes to those progressing to the national awards.

On behalf of all Victorians, thank you for your service to the Victorian community.

**Professor the Honourable
Margaret Gardner AC**
Governor of Victoria



20
25

MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER

Every day, every single Victorian plays their part in making our state a better, fairer and stronger place.

But there are some Victorians who really go that extra mile.

The Victorian Australian of the Year Awards celebrate the very best of our community: Victorians who have shown remarkable dedication, selflessness and compassion.

Victorians who've generously given themselves, their aspirations and abilities to make our state – and our world – a better place.

These awards recognise those amazing individuals.

To the 17 nominees, and on behalf of our entire state, I want to extend my congratulations.

Mostly, I want to say thank you. Thank you for all that you do to make our state all that it is.

Enjoy the celebrations.

Hon. Jacinta Allan MP
Premier of Victoria
Member for Bendigo East



20
25

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



**MADELEINE BUCHNER
OAM**

Young carer champion

At the age of 16, Madeleine Buchner OAM founded Little Dreamers, Australia's leading young carer support organisation. Little Dreamers supports young people aged 4 to 25 who care for a family member affected by disability, chronic or mental illness, addiction or frail age.

Madeleine's bold vision is to ensure that no young carer feels alone, unsupported or unrecognised. Each year, her vital organisation delivers over 14,500 hours of direct support to young carers – including respite care, educational support, mentorship programs and mental health resources.

Her efforts have empowered local communities to better understand and assist young carers, significantly improving the quality of life of 6,500 young people. In 2019, Madeleine was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia.

Madeleine's entrepreneurial spirit, leadership and dedication demonstrate how personal adversity can be transformed into positive change. She's a role model for resilience and a beacon of hope for all Australians.



**PROFESSOR DEBORAH
CHEETHAM FRAILLON AO**

**Soprano, composer and
arts pioneer**

Professor Deborah Cheetham Frailton AO is a Yorta Yorta/Yuin soprano, composer and educator who has been a leader and pioneer in Australia for 35 years.

Deborah champions the voice and visibility of Indigenous musicians through her achievements as artistic director of Short Black Opera Company, Dhungala Children's Choir and as First Nations Creative Chair of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

In 2010, Deborah created Australia's first Indigenous opera, *Pecan Summer*, and has composed for ensembles and artists around Australia. In 2018, Deborah established the One Day In January project to nurture Indigenous orchestral musicians and Ensemble Dutala, Australia's First Nations chamber ensemble.

Her achievements have been recognised with significant awards including the Don Banks Music Award, Queensland Government – Australian Women in Music Lifetime Achievement Award, the JC Williamson Lifetime Achievement Award and an Honorary Doctorate from University of South Australia. In 2014, Deborah was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia.



NEALE DANIHER AO

**Former Australian rules footballer
and co-founder, FightMND**

Neale Daniher AO is a former Australian rules player for the Essendon Football Club where at age 21, he was its youngest captain. Neale won widespread praise and accolades for his actions both on and off the field.

In 2013, Neale was diagnosed with motor neurone disease (MND), a debilitating disease that takes away someone's use of their arms and legs, then their ability to eat, speak and breathe.

Since diagnosis, Neale's been a tireless campaigner in the fight for a cure, co-founding the charity, Fight MND. Over 10 years, Neale has raised millions to help prevent the suffering of those diagnosed with MND in the future – and is often front and centre at the Big Freeze charity event held each year.

Even in his advanced stages, Neale has never shied away from the public eye and with his courage and relentless drive, remains dedicated to raising awareness and money for medical research.



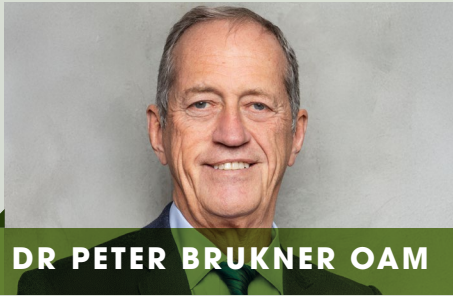
WAYNE HOLDSWORTH

**Activist against sexual extortion
and suicide**

Within three months of finding his beloved 17-year-old son Mac dead in his bedroom, Wayne Holdsworth channelled his personal devastation into preventing other families from having a similar experience.

Wayne is fighting to put a stop to sexual extortion, with rates growing exponentially. Sadly, the majority targeted are those who desire meaningful connections: young and older people. He's also campaigning to raise the age of social media access to 16 and working to end Australia's suicide epidemic. Suicide kills more than eight Australians a day, three times the annual road toll.

Wayne created the charity SmackTalk in Mac's name and today shares his story in a 40-minute SmackTalk presentation free of charge as a warning for others. He's spoken at thousands of workplaces, sporting clubs and school groups and has become a media spokesperson on the core issues of sexual exploitation, social media access and suicide prevention.



DR PETER BRUKNER OAM

Sports medicine leader and health campaigner

Dr Peter Brukner OAM profoundly inspired a generation of sports medicine practitioners, co-authoring the widely used textbook, *Clinical Sports Medicine*.

Peter founded the largest sports medicine centre in Australia: Olympic Park Sports Medicine Centre in Melbourne and is a founding member of the Australasian College of Sports Physicians, where he played a vital role in developing and recognising sports medicine as a full medical specialty.

As Professor of Sports Medicine at Latrobe University, he established the La Trobe Sport and Exercise Medicine Research Centre, a world-leading research centre in sports medicine.

After his own health issues, Peter established the not-for-profit SugarByHalf, which has produced far-reaching lessons for schoolchildren on the adverse effects of excessive added sugar. He wrote the best-selling books, *A Fat Lot of Good* and *The Diabetes Plan*, and founded Defeat Diabetes, an app- and web-based program endorsed by Diabetes Australia that aims to send type 2 diabetes into remission.



DR SANDRA CLOSE AM

Mining and finance pioneer and trailblazer, equality advocate

Starting university aged 16, Dr Sandra Close AM began campaigning for women's equality in 1965, and she's been fighting against discrimination for almost 60 years.

In 1967, Sandra became the first, full-time female exploration geologist in Australia and possibly the world. She then worked in banking, evaluating and financing major mineral projects and later became a senior executive in a multinational resources and energy group.

Today, trailblazer Sandra is recognised as an expert on the Australian gold industry, an author and a media commentator.

She was elected an Honorary Fellow of the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, the first woman in its 131-year history. In 2013, Sandra received its Sir Willis Connolly Memorial Medal – its only female recipient.

In 2018, Women in Mining United Kingdom named Sandra one of the Global 100 Inspirational Women in Mining. She also served on the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and its predecessors.



DR CAROLYN COOPER

Emergency physician

Dr Carolyn Cooper is one of Australia's longest-serving emergency medicine physicians delivering excellence in patient care.

Carolyn was among a small group of dedicated doctors who developed the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine, having identified the need for experienced medical personnel to lead this critical care area.

Her doctoral thesis on end-of-life planning identified the need for general practitioners and aged and palliative care staff to have essential conversations with patients and families.

At Austin Hospital, Carolyn initiated a medical-nursing model supporting a local aged care facility to better manage residents in house. This relieved pressure on unnecessary and anxiety-inducing presentations at the hospital's emergency department.

As the director for emergency medicine at Warrnambool Base Hospital, Carolyn's expertise enabled the hospital to achieve accreditation for its emergency department. Her relentless work means this regional community is provided with a higher standard of emergency medical care.



HEAM ELASMAR

Community volunteer

Heam Elasmr goes above and beyond to support community.

Since retiring in 2021 after 23 years assisting locals as an electorate officer in Cooper, Heam has been relied on in the Lebanese community for those who cannot navigate government departments, such as grants, aged care, NDIS and immigration. For this community work, Heam received the Australia Lebanon Chamber of Commerce and Industry's International Women's Day March 2022 award.

She's also the president of the Deir El Ahmar Region Melbourne, a group formed in 2017 to help those experiencing hardship in Melbourne and in Heam's village, Deir El Ahmar, in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.

Heam was a founding member of the Australian Lebanese Women's Christian Group, helping women connect around Melbourne regardless of religion. The group continues to grow across all age groups, providing networking, day trips and events.

Until recently, Heam volunteered on the governance committee at the Jika Jika Community Neighbourhood Centre.



**DR MOHAMMED
ALEBRAHIMI**

Optometrist

Iraqi-born Dr Mohammed Alebrahimi understands the isolation of arriving as a refugee to a new country. While still studying, he established People First Healthcare, sharing knowledge of Australian health services and providing better health outcomes for the elderly and isolated.

With the help of his mother, he also established the Beloved Group, aimed at getting people out of their house and into their community. Today the social network group has more than 3,000 people and offers wider support services and education.

To relieve unemployment in the migrant community, optometrist Mohammed has established businesses and worked with AMES Australia to offer vocational training, employment, health services and information to those in need.

His work has mainly focused on the Arabic speaking communities, but his passion has extended to delivering culturally appropriate care for all, especially refugee and migrant groups. Currently his practice supports up to 10 different languages and nearly every member of staff is bi-lingual.



AISHWARYA KANSAKAR

AI and automation entrepreneur

Aishwarya Kansakar is a globally renowned AI and automation entrepreneur, not-for-profit executive, STEM education innovator and an automation engineer who speaks six languages. Raised amidst Nepal's civil war, she survived an arson attack at school but went on to teach herself computing, launching her career.

Aishwarya now heads Syncrowin, building a world-first AI-powered automation system. Concurrently, as Women 4 STEM's chief operating officer, she leads 300 volunteers, impacting 70 schools and 66,000 women's STEM careers.

In 2024, Aishwarya pioneered a world-first STEM teaching model backed by \$3.2million in funding. Today, the model is nominated for the prestigious Yidan Prize, impacting 2,700 educators and 40,000 girls.

Digital Innovation Futures Victoria named Aishwarya as one of Victoria's top women in STEM. In 2022, Aishwarya became one of the youngest to be inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women and was awarded the Women in Digital 2021 Rising Star of the Year.



YUSUF LIBAN

**Community leader and founder,
Modest Fashion Runway**

Yusuf Liban is a dedicated advocate for multiculturalism and youth empowerment. He founded the Modest Fashion Runway in 2018, Australia's first event showcasing diverse and culturally inclusive fashion, attracting over 20,000 attendees annually and collaborating with Melbourne Fashion Week.

In December 2022, Yusuf was appointed director of the Multicultural Youth Group, a grassroots organisation with over 9,000 members, empowering young people through leadership workshops and community connections.

As a community engagement and policy advisor at the Victorian Multicultural Commission, Yusuf leads a multicultural youth network and advises the government on effective engagement strategies for diverse communities.

Yusuf's commitment to inclusivity earned him the 2021 Victorian Refugee Young Leader Award. He also serves on key advisory boards, including the African Australian Police Task Force, championing community safety and youth empowerment. A proud African refugee, Yusuf continues to foster initiatives that build stronger, connected communities.



LEONARDO PUGLISI

Founder, 6 News Australia

Leonardo Puglisi, at 16 years old, has made ground-breaking contributions to journalism at local, national and global levels. He founded 6 News Australia in 2019, initially covering local news in Melbourne then expanding to national and international coverage.

Leading a team of reporters from around Australia, Leonardo's platform has become a reliable and independent source of news for thousands of viewers. His innovative approach to digital journalism, utilising YouTube, TikTok and Twitter, has garnered a substantial following worldwide.

He's conducted notable interviews with key political figures, including Australian Prime Ministers Scott Morrison and Anthony Albanese.

Leonardo has created a platform that gives a voice to young Australians, encouraging them to engage with current events and understand their role in society. This initiative has not only educated young viewers but has also inspired many to pursue careers in journalism and media, fostering a new generation of informed, critical thinkers.



**DREW HERIOT &
DR JENNIFER HERIOT**

Founders, Full Spectrum Theatre

Dr Jennifer (Jenny) Heriot and her husband Drew are helping children on the autism spectrum gain skills and confidence through acting.

One day, Jenny introduced the couple's son, who has autism, to a theatre game. He was fascinated that changes in facial expression could change the meaning of statements. The next day, Jenny saw him using what he'd learned. That was her 'ah-ha' moment.

Between Jenny's own skillset as an audiologist, actor, dancer and musician, and her husband's as a director, producer and writer, Full Spectrum Theatre was born.

Each week, the troupes at Full Spectrum Theatre focus on developing essential life skills through engaging and carefully planned classes. They learn to 'support your troupe' while navigating a tightrope and the importance of 'celebrating mistakes' as they master juggling.

The children then take centre stage in heartwarming, original plays – preparing them to step confidently onto the grander world stage.



JASMINE HIRST

Football advocate for women

Over the last 15 years, Jasmine Hirst has given hundreds of girls and women the opportunity to play soccer.

Jasmine launched the Darebin Falcons Women's Sports Club junior girls' soccer program with just one team in 2011. Fast forward to the 2024 season, Jasmine has made possible over 30 junior and senior soccer teams and enabled more than 550 females to play soccer, including the largest girl-exclusive MiniRoos and MiniTillies programs in Victoria.

Jasmine's tireless efforts have given females access to scarce local facilities, grounds and equipment – creating Australia's biggest soccer program for girls and women.

In 2020, Jasmine launched the young referees program to increase the number of female referees in Victoria and to pay them for their services.

One of Australia's few female soccer administrators, Jasmine's trailblazing work has had a profound influence on growing football participation rates across Australia and an extraordinary impact on girls and women's sport.



DR JANA KATERINSKAJA

Advocate for preventing police perpetrated family violence

Dr Jana Katerinskaja is fearless and relentless in holding police forces to account for police perpetrated family violence.

In 2020, Jana founded a peer-support and advocacy group for people like herself who've suffered family violence at the hands of serving Victoria Police officers. Her grass roots survivor-led advocacy is voluntary and self-funded. She's supported countless victims through some of the darkest chapters of their lives with unwavering support.

Jana's activism helped drive Victoria Police to create a police perpetrated family violence policy and investigation unit within Victoria Police Professional Standards Command.

Furthermore, Jana's advocacy saw police perpetrated family violence announced as a strategic area of priority focus by Victoria's Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission.

At significant and unseen personal cost, Jana's fierce advocacy has resulted in material and meaningful amendments to the Victoria Police Act 2013 and independent police oversight practices. Jana's courageous and far-reaching efforts have no doubt spared others from abuse.



STEVE LEFEBVRE

Founder, Melbourne All Abilities Cricket Association

Steve Lefebvre loves cricket – he thinks everyone should be able to seek glory for their community on the pitch. Volunteering his time, energy and passion, Steve has done just that with the creation of the Melbourne All Abilities Cricket Association (MAACA).

Steve, a police veteran, started his project with the Moorabbin All-Abilities Cricket Club in 2008. He soon established two teams, navigating the unique needs of his players with disabilities and a little rule-adjustment to ensure maximum participation and satisfaction. With such success, Steve knew he could go statewide.

MAACA was officially born in 2015. It now has sixteen participating community cricket clubs in Victoria with their own established all-abilities teams who share the same uniform, chant, equipment, facilities and events as others.

Steve's inclusive, upscale-compatible model was recognised with the Community Cricket Association of the Year Award in 2018, and Steve himself was crowned Cricket Victoria's Volunteer of the Year in 2022.

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 VICTORIA'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 Victoria for the past five years. The full honour roll can be viewed at australianoftheyear.org.au

- Australian of the Year**

 - 2024** Janine Mohamed – Indigenous health leader
 - 2023** Dr Angraj Khillan – Paediatrician and co-founder, Health Awareness Society of Australia
 - 2022** Dylan Alcott AO - Athlete, paralympian, philanthropist, media commentator and advocate
 - 2021** Donna Stolzenberg - Founder and CEO, the National Homeless Collective
 - 2020** Archie Roach AM in Memoriam – Musical storyteller
- Senior Australian of the Year**

 - 2024** Glenys Oogjes – Animal justice advocate
 - 2023** Professor Frank Oberklaid AM – Paediatrician and founding director, Centre for Community Child Health
 - 2022** Gaye Hamilton - Deputy Chancellor of Victoria University
 - 2021** Bich Cam Nguyen - Founder, CEO of the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association
 - 2020** Dr Raymond Shuey APM - Road safety champion
- Young Australian of the Year**

 - 2024** Bhakta Bahadur Bhattarai – Registered nurse and founder, Albury Wodonga Multicultural Community Events Inc
 - 2023** Darcy McGauley-Bartlett – Advocate for Indigenous health care in prisons
 - 2022** Ahmed Hassan - Co-founder and executive director of Youth Activating Youth
 - 2021** Tayla Harris - Footballer, boxer, respectful relationships ambassador
 - 2020** Taya Davies - Youth worker and youth volunteer
- Australia's Local Hero**

 - 2024** Betul Tuna – Co-founder, Point of Difference Studio
 - 2023** Belinda Young – Founder, Mums of the Hills
 - 2022** Leo op den Brouw - Volunteer with the Mallacoota State Emergency Service
 - 2021** Dr Kirby White - Founder of Gowns for Doctors
 - 2020** Josephine Jones - Environmental and litter prevention 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



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.

NADC | National
Australia Day
Council