

Australian
of the Year
➤ Awards

Reflect. Respect. Celebrate.

New South Wales

THE CALYX, ROYAL BOTANIC GARDEN SYDNEY

10 November 2025

20
26

MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER

The 2026 NSW Australian of the Year Awards is a moment to honour the exceptional contributions of our fellow citizens.

Our nominees embody the very best of what it means to be Australian and the many remarkable ways this can be expressed.

To our nominees, please take tonight as a sign of how much you are valued and respected by your community and the people of this state.

The Australian of the Year Awards is about recognition, but it's also a tremendous opportunity to do good and to expand your impact.

Our Award recipients will receive a platform to lead some of the most important and compelling conversations our nation needs to have.

On behalf of the people of NSW, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the nominees and to the four category recipients.

I wish them the very best as they represent our state at the national Australian of the Year Awards ceremony in Canberra.



The Hon Chris Minns MP
Premier of the State of
New South Wales in the
Commonwealth of Australia



20
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THE AWARDS PROCESS



1
It all starts with your nomination



2
An expert panel selects one state and territory level 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 where you'll find the latest news and profiles of Australian of the Year Awards nominees, recipients and alumni.

For more information on Australia Day, our Ambassador Program, the free Aussie of the Month schools program, and the NADC, visit australiaday.org.au.



If our nominee stories bring 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



"We want these children to grow up knowing, there are more good people in the world than there are bad"

Martha Jabour OAM
2025 NSW Local Hero

"I think we can all agree, kindness is never wasted"

Kath Koschel
2025 NSW Australian of the Year

"If you go with the science, you end up with a more peaceful and sustainable society."

Dr Karl Kruszelnicki AM
2025 NSW Senior Australian of the Year

"We want to see the development of a culturally appropriate assessment tool for First Nations young people, so when they go to health services they feel valued and their voices are heard"

Maddison O'Grady-Lee
2025 NSW Young Australian of the Year

PROFESSOR NADIA BADAWI AM

Pioneering neonatologist



Professor Nadia Badawi is helping thousands of critically ill newborns survive and live healthy lives through her work as co-head of the Grace Centre for Newborn Care at The Children's Hospital, Westmead.

Under her leadership, survival rates for critically ill newborns at the Grace Centre are over 96% - among the best in the world. Beyond survival, Nadia is helping these babies thrive by championing early intervention and long-term developmental care.

As Cerebral Palsy Alliance Chair of Research, Nadia is reshaping our understanding of cerebral palsy, a leading cause of childhood disability. She has facilitated an explosion in cerebral palsy research, the findings of which have transformed knowledge and clinical practice globally. These breakthroughs have seen a 40% reduction in cerebral palsy rates in Australia, now among the lowest in the world.

Nadia's inspirational leadership and collaborative style has irrevocably changed the global landscape for the treatment of newborns and people with cerebral palsy.

DR JENNIFER MATTHEWS

Marine biologist



Inspired during her first scuba dive in Thailand in 2009 where she saw entire coral reefs devastated by bleaching, Dr Jennifer Matthews has dedicated her career to protecting ocean ecosystems.

Her pioneering research is unravelling life-saving nutrient interactions in corals to better inform management strategies. She developed a breakthrough coral "baby food" that more than doubles young coral survival, which is now being adopted by aquaculture and reef restoration programs across Australia.

Jennifer has also designed innovative microplastic removal technologies for wastewater and aquatic systems.

Beyond the lab, she founded Big Blue Conservation in Thailand, training hundreds of volunteers and local communities in reef protection and restoration. Closer to home, she launched the Sydney Coral Project, a landmark citizen science and research program uncovering NSW's unique coral ecosystems - the southernmost coral communities in the world.

Through science, innovation and education, Jennifer is driving solutions that give reefs a fighting chance.

NICHOLAS STEWART

LGBTIQ+ rights advocate



Renowned human rights lawyer Nicholas Stewart works tirelessly to ensure victims of LGBTIQ+ hate crimes receive justice.

Nicholas provides legal services and representation to LGBTIQ+ clients, particularly in criminal and mental health proceedings, as well as representing clients facing discrimination, bullying and vilification for their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Meeting with members of the NSW Parliament, community leaders and victims, Nicholas successfully campaigned for the 2018 and 2019 NSW parliamentary inquiries into LGBTIQ+ hate crimes. He also pushed for the 2022 Special Commission of Inquiry into institutional responses to LGBTIQ+ hate crimes and homicides.

To support witnesses through the process of giving evidence to the inquiries, Nicholas established a pro bono clinic for families and victims of hate crimes.

Nicholas has given hope to the families of victims who had been without answers for decades, becoming a light at the end of a very dark tunnel for so many Australians.

DR ALISON THOMPSON OAM

Global humanitarian



Dr Alison Thompson has deployed over 30,000 volunteers to the world's worst disaster zones - bringing humanitarian assistance and medical aid to over 18 million people.

It started on September 11, 2001, when as an investment banker, Alison rushed to New York's World Trade Centre with her first aid kit. She stayed nine months, offering disaster relief arm-in-arm with ordinary, like-minded people.

Galvanising grassroots momentum, Alison founded Third Wave Volunteers - a global movement of first responder volunteers who bring relief to the world's disaster and war zones, including Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka. Following the 2004 tsunami, she set up the first Tsunami Early-Warning Centre and education museum which continues to thrive.

By mobilising everyday people, Alison is building resilience in local communities through sustainable, locally driven disaster prevention and recovery.

Drawing from her upbringing as a pastor's child, Alison believes that each person's small skills add up to drive big changes.

PROFESSOR HENRY BRODATY AO

Dementia treatment pioneer



Professor Henry Brodaty is transforming the diagnosis, care and prevention of dementia – improving countless lives, both in Australia and around the world.

In 1972, Henry's father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease at just 52 years old. At that time, dementia was poorly understood and often ignored. People living with dementia and carers had little support and no pathway forward.

His father's experience catalysed a lifetime of work that not only revolutionised Henry's own field of psychiatry, but also the lives of people living with dementia and their families.

In 2012, Henry co-founded the Centre for Healthy Brain Ageing and led internationally significant research that enhanced the world's understanding of risk and prevention. His large Maintain Your Brain trial demonstrated that straightforward, cost-effective, targeted interventions can profoundly delay onset and even prevent dementia.

Henry is a leader who has reshaped dementia care from every angle as he navigates toward a future where dementia is better treated and prevented.

BOB HOLDER

Professional cowboy



At 94 years old, Bob Holder is the world's oldest competitive cowboy and an inspiration to younger riders.

Bob has always loved wild horses and cattle. At 14, he forged a letter from his mum so he could compete in an over-16s rodeo in Tumut, which he went on to win – bringing home about 3 pounds, the equivalent of five weeks' wages.

The win kicked off Bob's 81-year professional rodeo career.

Bob was the first Australian to win prize money in a professional rodeo in the United States at the annual world championships held in Madison Square Garden in New York in 1959.

Based in his hometown of Cootamundra, Bob has earned a permanent place in the Australian Rodeo Hall of Fame and the admiration of generations of riders. Proudly promoting Australia as he travels, Bob is humble, indefatigable and inspires generations with every ride.



SUE MANN

Home care nurse

Over Sue Mann's 50-year career as a registered nurse, she and her team have cared for thousands of older Australians with dignity and respect in the comfort of their own homes.

Sue's vision for quality patient care started when, as a trainee nurse, she was reprimanded for sitting with an anxious patient to talk to them about an impending operation instead of tidying the ward.

The experience motivated Sue to start her own private nursing service, so she could treat each patient with the compassion they deserved. Sue started out in 1984 with just a car, a phone, an address book and the respect of the local doctors. Her clientele grew rapidly, mainly consisting of war veterans requiring in-home nursing care.

A pioneer in the homecare industry, Sue Mann's Nursing Service, later myHomecare, became the largest homecare provider in Australia, caring for 20,000 older Australians in their homes each year.

PETER WATSON

Founder, Men's Kitchen



Peter Watson is transforming thousands of lives with a simple act – teaching older men to cook in a supportive, social setting. What began as six men in a Forestville kitchen has grown into a thriving Australia-wide network, where each month 100 volunteers run sessions for 200 participants.

It all started when Peter's own father became a widower. He had no idea how to cook. From being a strong man all his life, his health slid into decline.

Peter didn't want to be in the same situation if his own wife were to pass away before him. He also understood the silent challenges faced by older men – particularly isolation and loss of confidence.

More than a cooking class, Men's Kitchen offers a caring environment to build practical skills and real camaraderie. There's also access to a psychologist for participants who are struggling, such as from the loss of a partner.

NEDD BROCKMANN

Ultramarathon runner for homelessness



Nedd Brockmann, a then 23-year-old electrician from Forbes, had a goal – to run across Australia and inspire people to do more for themselves and the homeless.

Nedd's concern for homelessness was sparked by his journey into TAFE every week where he saw too many people sleeping rough on Sydney's Eddy Avenue. He wanted to do something to highlight homelessness, its complexities and prove that it's solvable.

So, in 2022, he ran from Perth's Cottesloe Beach to Sydney's iconic Bondi Beach, completing a 3,952km journey over 46 days, and becoming the fastest ever Australian to do so. Nedd raised over \$2.6 million from over 37,000 individual contributors.

He went on to start Nedd's Uncomfortable Challenge in 2024, and with his team, has raised over \$8 million for those experiencing homelessness. He also raises funds for his charity partner, Mobilise, to change lives through innovative programs to reduce the number of people sleeping rough.

JACK BROWN

Co-founder, Talk2MeBro



Jack Brown is on a mission to end suicide in Australia.

Following the tragic loss of a family member to suicide, Jack co-founded Talk2MeBro in 2018. Heartbroken, Jack was determined to drive real change.

What began as a safe space where people could share their struggles without judgement has grown into a dynamic national organisation.

Talk2MeBro gives everyone the tools to feel comfortable having meaningful conversations about mental health. By encouraging a culture of awareness, resilience and support, Jack is committed to a future where talking about mental health is commonplace.

Helping people through their darkest moments, Jack, together with his crew of over 100 trained volunteers, facilitate over 180 free community events in parks and on beaches across Australia each year as well as workshops in schools, workplaces and sporting clubs. So far, Talk2MeBro has impacted 105,000 lives, nationally.

Jack's relentless work ethic, drive and humility is building a healthier and more connected society.

RUBY RIETHMULLER

Girls wellbeing champion



Ruby Riethmuller believes that young people who live in regional, rural and remote Australia should have the same opportunity to access mental health support as their city peers.

Born and raised on a farm in regional New South Wales, Ruby understands the isolation and lack of services that many young people face – particularly girls. In Australia, suicide is the leading single cause of death for girls aged 16 to 24.

Putting advocacy into action, in 2020 Ruby founded Womn-Kind, a national social enterprise delivering wellbeing workshops in schools and via a digital app, the Womn-Kind App.

Ruby has helped young people talk about their experiences and communities see mental health as a shared responsibility. Beyond mental health, Ruby believes in empowering youth leadership and has put this into action through founding the Womn-Kind National Youth Leadership Panel.

So far Womn-Kind has supported over 30,000 young people, with more than 7,000 young people engaging with Womn-Kind online every day.

DR RAND YOUNES

Dental health advocate



Dr Rand Younes is a passionate dentist working to close the gap in oral care access for vulnerable children. With Palestinian background, she migrated to Australia at 11 years old with little English, and went on to become dux of her school, achieve a 99 ATAR, and rank second in the state for English.

While studying dentistry in rural NSW, Rand saw firsthand the deep inequities in healthcare. At just 17, she founded Impact Mobile Dental Services, now known as Pearly, a program that brings dental care and prevention into schools and communities that would otherwise go without.

Pearly has reached over 150,000 children and treated more than 40,000 children. Rand is now Australia's youngest dental clinic owner and the youngest ever recipient of the global Top 100 Doctors award.

Her focus remains simple - improving lives, one child's smile at a time, with a long-term goal to reach and empower one million smiles by 2030.

ANDREW & LYNDELL CLARK

Robotics mentors



Andrew and Lyndell Clark have spent 16 years bringing STEM opportunities to thousands of Wollongong children.

As founders of the Project Bucephalus robotics teams, the couple mentor children from diverse educational, financial, and cultural backgrounds by teaching them the skills to compete in the FIRST Robotics programs. Andrew and Lyndell teach participants, around 70% of whom have a disability, to be proud of who they are and have claimed honours on every competitive level, including the highest award in the global program.

Andrew and Lyndell also founded the LEGO robotics programs in Wollongong, which reaches 11,000 local children and provides a platform for kids to experience competition, turning Wollongong into a robotics powerhouse.

Andrew and Lyndell have pioneered STEM programs for kids who may be falling through the cracks. Their Unstoppable program uses robotics to divert at-risk youth from crime and has been highly successful, with not a single participant reoffending over the program's four years.

KATE CLEARY

Restoring lives



Social worker Kate Cleary has transformed a run-down convent in rural NSW into a safe and welcoming place for women to stay, build life skills and be reunited with their children.

When working as a social worker at a Canberra jail, someone mentioned that an empty convent on rural land was available. Kate jumped at the opportunity.

In her experience, the deep needs of women recovering from substance addiction were so complex, and their trauma so profound – particularly the removal of their children – that a more holistic and intensive model of care was needed. Kate's project to restore the land and convent beautifully complemented her goal to restore hope to women recovering from dependency and domestic violence.

Since opening its doors, The Farm has helped dozens of women recover from substance dependency and reunited them with their children. Kate believes that whatever has been lost in a person's life can be restored.

ANEIKA KAPEEN

Indigenous youth advocate



Proud Yaegl and Bunjalung woman Aneika Kapeen is helping young First Nations people connect with culture through art, language and sport.

Aneika was deeply concerned that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Clarence Valley were facing compounding challenges including staying engaged with formal education, loss of cultural identity and pride, and social and financial disadvantage.

In response, Aneika established the Mudyala Aboriginal Corporation in 2019. The not-for-profit organisation transforms lives by enabling young people and their families to connect and engage with education in a comfortable and culturally appropriate manner.

Aneika supports families at crucial transition points such as starting school and entering high school. Under Aneika's leadership, the Community Preschool Engagement Program has delivered more than one million hours of learning and play time for children through local kindergarten, preschool and school partnerships.

THERESA MITCHELL

Carer for the homeless



Theresa Mitchell cares for people who are homeless or in crisis, providing a compassionate lifeline for people who've fallen through the gaps.

Opening its doors in 2009, Agape Outreach Inc began when Theresa found she couldn't walk past homeless people on the street anymore. So, she handed out meals she cooked in her own kitchen.

Today, Agape operates throughout the Northern Rivers and Gold Coast with the support of more than 300 volunteers. Together they provide over 1,500 hot meals every week to vulnerable people on the streets and offer capability-building services such as back-to-work programs, psychology and basic life skills.

With kindness, compassion and practical care, Theresa has changed countless lives in the last 16 years. As well as advocating for the homeless and disadvantaged, Theresa has fostered 37 children.

Agape means 'unconditional love' – a sacrificial love that transcends and persists, regardless of circumstance. This is Theresa's gift to her community.

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 2026 Australian of the Year Awards recognising the outstanding service to the community that many Australians make.

This year we have developed original artistic and musical works to recognise Australia's highest achievers for the National Australia Day Council. The trophies for the 2026 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.



RECOGNISING THE STATES 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 New South Wales for the past five years. The full honour roll can be viewed at australianoftheyear.org.au

	2025	Kath Koschel – Founder, Kindness Factory
	2024	Professor Georgina Long AO and Professor Richard Scolyer AO – Melanoma treatment pioneers
	2023	Craig Foster AM – Human rights and anti-racism activist, former Soccerroo
	2022	Professor Veena Sahajwalla – Founding Director of the Centre for Sustainable Materials Research and Technology at the University of New South Wales
	2021	Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons AFSM – Ex-NSW Fire Commissioner
	2025	Dr Karl Kruszelnicki AM – Science enthusiast and educator
	2024	John Ward – Geriatrician and co-founder, Hunter Ageing Alliance
	2023	Teresa Plane – Palliative care pioneer and advocate
	2022	Abla Tohamy Kadous – President of the Islamic Women's Welfare Association
	2021	Aunty Isabel Reid – Elder and advocate for the Stolen Generation
	2025	Maddison O'Grady-Lee – Mental health advocate and researcher
	2024	Nikhil Autar – Researcher and founder, Bheem Health
	2023	Lottie Dalziel – Founder, Banish and sustainability champion
	2022	Dr Daniel Nour – Founder of Street Side Medics
	2021	Nathan Parker – Pilot Invictus Games gold medallist
	2025	Martha Jabour OAM – Co-founder, Homicide Victims Support Group
	2024	Angus Olsen – Childhood cancer illustrator and author
	2023	Amar Singh – Founder, Turbans 4 Australia
	2022	Shanna Whan – Founder and CEO of Sober in the Country
	2021	Rosemary Kariuki – Advocate for migrant and refugee women

* 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



