

MEDIA RELEASE
4 NOVEMBER 2025

2026 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS
NOMINEES FOR TASMANIA ANNOUNCED

Nominees for the 2026 Australian of the Year Awards for Tasmania include a platypus guardian, an artist with cerebral palsy changing perceptions, a volunteer ambulance officer, a café owner changing lives, an emergency doctor and a rock singer raising funds for lifesaving cancer treatments.

The nominees are:

2026 Australian of the Year for Tasmania

Mitch McPherson - Mental health advocate (New Town)
Dr Rosie Nash - Health literacy leader (Blackmans Bay)
Tyler Richardson - Musician and fundraiser (Kingston)
Dr Jorian (Jo) Kippax - Emergency doctor (Ridgeway)

2026 Senior Australian of the Year for Tasmania

Margaret Chilcott - Volunteer ambulance officer (Poatina)
Julie Dunbabin - Nutritious eating visionary (Taroona)
Brendan Sullivan - Men's health and wellbeing advocate (Rosny)
Adriana Taylor - Community representative (Collinsvale)

2026 Young Australian of the Year for Tasmania

Reede Adams-Beckett - Youth advocate (Launceston)
Laura Johnson OAM - Mental health advocate (Smithton/Somerset)
Alyssia Kennedy - Life skills educator (Heybridge)
Sahar Naqshband - Refugee mentor (New Norfolk)

2026 Local Hero for Tasmania

Emily Briffa - Social entrepreneur (West Hobart)
Janelle McMillan OAM - Disability advocate (Collinsvale)
Rodney Spinks - Community charity worker (Launceston)
Pete Walsh - Wildlife campaigner (South Hobart)

*[*see detailed bios on following pages](#)*

The nominees for Tasmania are among 134 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The Tasmania award recipients will be announced on Tuesday 18 November 2025 in a ceremony at the Theatre Royal Hobart, which will also be available to watch online at australianoftheyear.org.au.

They will then join other state and territory recipients as finalists for the national awards announcement on 25 January 2026 in Canberra.

National Australia Day Council CEO Mark Fraser AO CVO said the nominees for the Tasmania awards reflect the many ways in which Australians are making a difference.

"The nominees for the Tasmania awards are doing extraordinary things," said Mark.

"While they are contributing in many different ways, they are all helping. Helping people, helping communities, helping in crises, helping the environment and our wildlife, helping create opportunities and helping to bring about change."

ENDS.

Nominee [bios on the following pages](#) and can also be viewed from australianoftheyear.org.au
Nominees have supplied [photos which can be downloaded](#) from this link: [TASMANIA Nominee Photos](#)

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2026 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR TASMANIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Mitch McPherson

Mental health advocate

When Mitch McPherson's younger brother died by suicide in 2013, Mitch was driven to do whatever he could to spare other families the same trauma and grief. He founded SPEAK UP! StayChatTY to increase mental health awareness and promote suicide prevention.

Since 2014, Mitch has spoken to more than 1200 community groups, schools and workplaces to share his lived experience and spread the message that "nothing is so bad that you can't talk about it". SPEAK UP! StayChatTY has grown into a major mental health initiative in partnership with Relationships Australia Tasmania, delivering awareness programs, hosting events and encouraging discussion about mental health and suicide.

Mitch, 38, works tirelessly to foster engagement, regularly appearing on radio and TV, hosting a weekend sports radio show, and working as an event MC where his communication skills enable him to connect with audiences through empathy and shared experiences.

His example highlights the power of resilience, courage and openness to make a positive difference.

Dr Rosie Nash

Health literacy leader

Dr Rosie Nash is one of Australia's leading health literacy experts, dedicated to helping people be better informed about their health. Rosie plays a vital role in a world where people are bombarded with misinformation and are often uncertain about navigating health services.

Rosie is passionate about improving health literacy to improve health and educational outcomes and overcome health inequity. Using her knowledge as a registered pharmacist and senior lecturer in public health at the University of Tasmania, she develops health promotion and prevention programs which forefront health literacy.

In 2016, Rosie co-designed world-leading HealthLit4Kids to help schools develop health literate citizens. Spinning from this research, Rosie founded HealthLit4Everyone, a social enterprise organisation that aims to improve health literacy in the community through education, consultation and advocacy.

Throughout her work, 45-year-old Rosie displays an unwavering commitment to overcoming social inequity, leading with intelligence, compassion and a deep understanding of real-world issues.

Tyler Richardson

Musician and fundraiser

Many Australians will know Tyler Richardson as the lead singer of the rock band Luca Brasi, but he's also a successful campaigner and fundraiser for lifesaving cancer treatments.

When his son was being treated for neuroblastoma, Tyler joined forces with other families to lobby for an expensive and potentially lifesaving cancer treatment from the USA to be added to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. As a result, patients can now use it for free.

Tyler, 37, has raised funds to support children and families affected by cancer and donated his musical talents to help bushfire victims and Guide Dogs Tasmania. He is also Tasmania's first Lifeline Ambassador, working to raise awareness about mental health and suicide prevention.

Tyler's leadership, generosity and using his voice (in more ways than one) to advocate for change is making a genuine difference to the community at large.

Dr Jorian (Jo) Kippax

Emergency doctor

Dr Jo Kippax was part of a specialist team of rescuers tasked to free a whitewater rafter who was trapped in perilous rapids on the Franklin River in 2024.

Lithuanian whitewater rafter, Valdas Bieliauskas, was retrieved from freezing water by Jo and his team. The clinical team performed an operation to amputate Valdas's leg underwater, allowing him to be freed and ultimately saving his life. Throughout the rescue, Jo was instrumental in guiding the team with professionalism, courage and remarkable calmness under pressure.

For this life-saving act, the President of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėda awarded the country's Life Saving Cross award to Jo, which he humbly accepted on behalf of his team.

The rescue of Valdas is just one chapter in Jo's long career in emergency medicine, disaster response, and search and rescue. Demonstrating outstanding skill, courage and team leadership in the aid of others, Jo displays selfless dedication to saving lives in often very challenging circumstances.

2026 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR TASMANIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Margaret Chilcott

Volunteer ambulance officer

Margaret Chilcott's selfless work as a volunteer ambulance officer is just one chapter in a lifetime of helping people in need.

Margaret has dedicated more than 50,000 volunteer hours to Ambulance Tasmania, a contribution that reflects her deep commitment to frontline care. Emergency volunteers are often the first on the scene in a crisis, offering immediate and life-saving assistance to those in need.

Margaret worked for many years as a humanitarian aid worker in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Her vast experience in delivering aid relief in crisis situations is evident by her calm leadership, clinical skill and tireless dedication to others.

Margaret, 78, is the unit coordinator of the Poatina Community Emergency Response Team, does frequent shifts at Longford and Campbell Town Branch Stations and assists in mentoring new volunteers. Her devotion to helping others has made an immense contribution to the wellbeing and safety of fellow Tasmanians.

Julie Dunbabin

Nutritious eating visionary

Julie Dunbabin, 65, is a pioneer in school nutrition, who is changing the way education departments and schools prepare and deliver school lunches to children. Julie's vision is for all school children to receive a nutritious, sit-down meal every day, prepared from scratch in a school or central kitchen, using seasonal, local produce.

Today, the School Lunch Program prepares 14,332 school lunches for 6,656 students every week. The program, which started initially with three schools, is expected to expand to 60 schools in 2026.

The program has clear benefits for children, ensuring they receive a nutritious meal each day and contributing to better social and learning outcomes. The model of cook-from-scratch kitchens also supports local producers, creates jobs for kitchen and warehouse staff, builds community involvement and addresses food security for families.

Julie's determination to improve children's diets is transforming how school lunches are delivered in Tasmania, inspiring a healthier food culture and enhancing food literacy.

Brendan Sullivan

Men's health and wellbeing advocate

Brendan Sullivan's immense contribution to voluntary service includes improving men's health, coaching and mentoring pre-parole prisoners, and supporting people who live with disabilities. Underpinning his service is a commitment to bringing men of all abilities together to support their wellbeing and build healthy communities.

Brendan was instrumental in launching the annual Tasmanian Men's Gathering and was the inaugural president of TasMen, the association that hosts the event and supports a range of wellbeing and learning activities.

Brendan, 70, has also played a major role with Pathways To Manhood: a rite of passage program for fathers and sons; Men's Resources Tasmania: a not-for-profit organisation promoting men's wellbeing; and Building Pathways: a mentoring program for prisoners who are due to be released.

Through these and many other coaching activities, Brendan has had a profoundly beneficial impact on the lives of thousands of men in Tasmania and throughout Australia.

Adriana Taylor

Community representative

Adriana Taylor has dedicated her life to public service in government and community organisations, working tirelessly to improve the lives of Tasmanians.

She is a long-time member of the Country Women's Association, serving on the state executive and most recently, taking on the role of president with a focus on revitalising the association.

Adriana served on Glenorchy City Council for many years and was elected mayor. She founded the Glenorchy Community Fund which, for the past 16 years, has been raising funds and distributing much-needed grants to community groups. Other public roles include representing Elwick on the Tasmanian Legislative Council and serving as Commissioner for the Huon Valley.

Through all the years of dedicated service to Tasmania, 79-year-old Adriana has been known for her selfless work on behalf of others, her willingness to champion worthwhile causes and her ability to relate to people from all walks of life.

2026 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR TASMANIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Reede Adams-Beckett

Youth advocate

Reede Adams-Beckett is passionate about giving a voice to Tasmania's young people and ensuring their views are heard at the highest level.

He has represented young people on a wide range of advisory bodies in Tasmania and nationally. He is currently Tasmania's Young Ambassador for UNICEF Australia, an 18-month program to develop advocacy and leadership skills.

Reede has spoken openly about being bullied at school and his struggles with mental health, using a Tasmanian Parliamentary Inquiry into bullying and discrimination to advocate for change. As a proud Palawa man, he has a deep interest in First Nations social justice and takes an active role in elevating First Nations perspectives in local and global forums.

Reede, 22, is focused on empowering young people in Tasmania to achieve meaningful change, inspiring others with his passion and work ethic to amplify youth voices in Tasmania and bring them to a national stage.

Laura Johnson OAM

Mental health advocate

Laura Johnson is a proud Palawa woman and advocate for mental health and suicide prevention.

After struggling with her own mental health and supporting her sister with a severe eating disorder, she founded THEIRS (Talk, Hear and Help, Educate, Inform, Refer and Support), a community-driven organisation addressing gaps through impactful events. In 2024, THEIRS brought Jazz Thornton to northwestern Tasmania, impacting over 80,000 people.

Laura, 26, advocates for youth mental health at various levels, including by speaking in parliament. She sits on multiple mental health boards and committees and is often the youngest member and has been invited to speak at schools across the state.

She's been widely recognised, winning a LiFE Award for Suicide Prevention, named a 2024 Heywire Trailblazer, a finalist for Young Tasmanian of the Year, winner of the MAIB Excellence in Leadership Award 2025, and is one of the youngest ever to receive the Order of Australia Medal for her contribution to youth mental health.

Alyssia Kennedy

Life skills educator

When Alyssia Kennedy left school, she realised she lacked many of the skills needed to manage day-to-day life, such as how to create a budget or do her taxes. Like many before her, she had to learn the hard way.

Realising how important these skills can be, Alyssia founded the Life After School program, an educational package to help bridge the gap between school education and life knowledge. She now works with schools and youth groups to deliver the program and give young people the tools they need to transition to adulthood.

Alyssia, 29, was chosen as a 2025 ABC Trailblazer for her Life After School Program, which recognises innovative solutions for young people in regional Australia, giving Alyssia the opportunity to present her ideas to policymakers in Canberra.

Alyssia's vision, energy and commitment are giving a generation of young people the tools they need not just to survive but thrive in adulthood.

Sahar Naqshband

Refugee mentor

Sahar Naqshband empowers women from culturally diverse backgrounds by helping them overcome language barriers, build confidence, and become more self-reliant. Based in Hobart, she works with the Be Hers Foundation, supporting refugee women through initiatives such as the *Dream Again* mentoring program and the Be Hers sewing project. Beginning as a seamstress, Sahar has grown into a mentor, facilitator and community leader.

Over the past three years, she has trained over 45 women, providing them with practical sewing skills, accredited training, and pathways to employment. Under her leadership, the Be Hers sewing program, delivered in partnership with TasTAFE, has evolved into a hub for empowerment and community building.

Sahar, 26, also works with Unions Tasmania to educate refugee employees about their workplace rights and obligations, helping to create safer, fairer working environments. Her dedication is making a lasting impact, fostering stronger communities and expanding opportunities for women to thrive.

2026 LOCAL HERO FOR TASMANIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Emily Briffa

Social entrepreneur

Emily Briffa's social enterprise, Hamlet, has helped many disadvantaged and marginalised people in Hobart overcome employment barriers and transform their lives.

Hamlet is a community café that provides individualised training, work readiness and wrap-around support to Tasmanians with disability, neurodivergence, and mental health concerns who are experiencing barriers to employment.

Since its inception, Hamlet has helped more than 700 people gain experience to enter the job market and given them valuable skills and training. Emily has continued to expand Hamlet's operations, creating more job opportunities in a variety of catering and hospitality roles. Under her leadership, Hamlet boasts an impressive 75% employment placement rate for people who complete its training programs.

Hamlet's focus on social inclusion for marginalised groups is a model for what social enterprises can achieve. Driven by 36-year-old Emily's passion and vision, the café has become an integral part of Hobart's community and the lives of many people.

Janelle McMillan OAM

Disability advocate

Janelle McMillan's artworks and storytelling demonstrate her skill and determination to raise awareness about what it's like to live with disabilities and communication challenges.

Janelle lives with cerebral palsy and is non-verbal, using a wheelchair for mobility. As an author, illustrator and artist, she uses her experiences to educate, inform and campaign for greater inclusivity and acceptance of people living with disabilities.

Janelle is a prolific artist and an even bigger fundraiser for many charities, using her design skills to raise thousands of dollars for causes such as cancer research. She also publishes children's books to educate kids about what it means to be non-verbal, and campaigns to spread her message of understanding and acceptance.

Through her drive, energy and talent, 49-year-old Janelle is challenging perceptions about what it means to live with a disability, creating a space where people with communication challenges can be heard and making society more inclusive.

Rodney Spinks

Community charity worker

Rodney Spinks is well-known in the Launceston community as someone who gets things done for those in need. His tireless work for the Launceston Benevolent Society, St Vincent de Paul and the Rotary Club of Tamar Sunrise ensures that vulnerable members in the local community have access to food, shelter and essential services.

In these roles, he has raised awareness about critical social issues such as homelessness, youth disadvantage and food insecurity – and he has delivered solutions that make a difference.

Rodney, 64, is the driving force behind a community initiative to open a social supermarket in Launceston that offers basic provisions in a non-judgemental and respectful environment. He is a 2025 recipient of the Churchill Fellowship to study international best practice in addressing food security through social supermarkets.

He approaches every issue with respect, treating everybody with the dignity they deserve, and setting an example for all others to follow.

Pete Walsh

Wildlife campaigner

Hobart's 'platypus guardian' Pete Walsh, is the driving force behind a community campaign to protect the platypus population that lives in the Hobart Rivulet.

Pete is a keen photographer and nature lover, and his fascination with the local platypuses revealed the negative effect that human activities were having on the population, prompting him to take action. As a result, he founded Hobart Rivulet Platypus, a community group dedicated to the protection of the platypus population by raising awareness about the impact of urban expansion. Through his campaigning, Pete has mobilised the local community to clean up the waterway and regenerate native flora along the banks.

Pete, 58, has also contributed new insights into platypus behaviour and generously shares his knowledge with the public. His story highlights how an individual can inspire a community to take action to protect native species, not just in the wild, but in populated areas too.