

MEDIA RELEASE
SUNDAY 25 JANUARY 2026

2026 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS ANNOUNCED

2026 Australian of the Year – Katherine Bennell-Pegg (SA)
2026 Senior Australian of the Year – Professor Henry Brodaty AO (NSW)
2026 Young Australian of the Year – Nedd Brockmann (NSW)
2026 Australia's Local Hero – Frank Mitchell (WA)

The first Australian to qualify as an Astronaut under Australia's own space program; a man whose family experience of dementia is reshaping care and prevention of the condition globally; a young man inspiring millions through ultra marathon running to help solve homelessness; and a Whadjuk-Yued Noongar man changing lives through training and jobs have been named as the 2026 Australian of the Year award recipients.

The Prime Minister, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, announced the 2026 Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year and Australia's Local Hero in a ceremony at the National Arboretum in Canberra this evening.

At the 66th Australian of the Year Awards announcement, the award recipients were presented with a handcrafted glass trophy, a traditional Indigenous coolamon and clap sticks.

The 2026 Australian of the Year is Astronaut, Katherine Bennell-Pegg.

Katherine Bennell-Pegg is making history as the first Australian to qualify as an astronaut under Australia's space program, opening pathways for others to follow.

Katherine graduated from Basic Astronaut Training in 2024 as part of a class of six trained by the European Astronaut Centre in Germany, the first international candidate to do so. She was initially chosen for the program from a field of over 22,500 applicants.

Katherine has harboured ambitions of becoming an astronaut since she was a young child. As a space engineer, she has advanced multiple space missions and technologies.

Alongside her career achievements, Katherine is an energetic champion for Australia's space program, regularly presenting to audiences of schoolchildren and industry leaders to inspire the next generation and create new opportunities.

Katherine, 41, is a genuine trailblazer in Australia's emerging space industry. With her determination and drive to succeed, she is a powerful example for young Australians.

[VIDEO - KATHERINE BENNELL-PEGG](#)

The 2026 Senior Australian of the Year is dementia treatment pioneer, Professor Henry Brodaty AO.

Professor Henry Brodaty AO 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, 78, is a leader who has reshaped dementia care from every angle as he navigates toward a future where dementia is better treated and prevented.

[VIDEO - PROFESSOR HENRY BRODATY AO](#)

The 2026 Young Australian of the Year is ultramarathon runner for homelessness, Nedd Brockmann.

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, now 27, 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.

[VIDEO - NEDD BROCKMANN](#)

Australia's Local Hero for 2026 is Indigenous construction leader, Frank Mitchell.

Frank Mitchell, 43, a proud Whadjuk-Yued Noongar man, is co-director of Wilco Electrical and co-founder/director of Kardan, Baldja and Bilyaa in the trades and construction industry.

Frank's commitment to change was shaped by early lived experiences of suicide and the loss of best friends. As a young single father, being offered an electrical apprenticeship felt like a profound opportunity. When he became a business owner in 2015, he pledged to create the same opportunities for Mob.

Starting with just eight staff and \$1.5 million turnover, Frank and his partners have created over 70 Aboriginal upskilling positions in the electrical and construction industry, including 30 electrical apprenticeships and awarding over \$11 million to Aboriginal subcontractors.

Today, all four companies collectively employ over 200 full-time staff. His story embodies a vision that integrates cultural values with business leadership, strengthening his ties to community while reshaping the construction industry and creating lasting impact and social justice.

[VIDEO - FRANK MITCHELL](#)

National Australia Day Council CEO Mr Mark Fraser AO CVO congratulated the 2026 Australian of the Year Award recipients.

"The 2026 Australians of the Year are visionaries. Their motivations and goals go far beyond their own interests and achievements. Rather, they are driven by outcomes which benefit others," said Mr Fraser.

"Katherine is forging new frontiers for Australians in space engineering, research and exploration. Her work is shaping the future not only in space, but in everyday life through the impact of research and development. She leads by example, openly sharing her story to inspire the next generation and reminding us all of the power of a dream, and where determination can lead.

"Henry has turned his personal experience into a lifelong commitment to improving outcomes for people living with dementia. His research is expanding understanding of the condition and identifying ways to prevent and delay its onset. His work will benefit not just those affected today, but all of us in the future.

"Nedd, confronted by how easily people can experience homelessness and the growing scale of the problem, chose not to look away. Instead, he took action and he hasn't stopped since. He continues to run for change, finding new ways to help end homelessness, and engaging others to join the fight along the way. He is a young man on a clear mission to challenge us all to make a lasting difference.

"Frank's lived experience has inspired him to pay it forward and create opportunities for others. His approach to building an industry-led community that combines training, employment and culture is delivering stronger futures for people who need them most and demonstrates what can be achieved through collaboration and social inclusion."

AWARD RECIPIENTS ON AUSTRALIA DAY

Katherine Bennell-Pegg, Professor Henry Brodaty AO, Nedd Brockmann and Frank Mitchell will attend the National Australia Day Citizenship and Flag Raising Ceremony in Canberra on Australia Day morning, Monday 26 January 2026. They will then travel to Sydney for the Australia Day Live concert at the Opera House.

AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS PROCESS

Each year, public nominations for the Australian of the Year Awards close on 31 July. State and territory nominees are then selected from these public submissions. State and territory recipients are announced at events during November. These state and territory award recipients then become the national finalists, with the national awards announced on 25 January the following year.

If there's someone you think should be considered for the 2027 Australian of the Year Awards, you can nominate them now at australianoftheyear.org.au.

SPECIAL HONOURS LIST FOR BONDI

During the 2026 Australian of the Year Awards announcement broadcast, the Prime Minister will acknowledge the extraordinary acts of many in the community in response to the Bondi attack and the Special Honours List for Bondi currently being prepared.

ENDS.

BIO details for recipients attached with this media release – *see following pages*

PHOTOS: Photos of the 2026 Awards recipients will be available for download after 9:00pm 25 January 2026 – Awards Announcement folder at this link: 260123_Media_Photos - Australian of the Year Awards 2026
Please credit NADC/Salty Dingo

SPEECHES: Downloadable from this link AFTER 9:40pm AEDT: 2026_Awards_Speeches - Check Against Delivery

MEDIA CONTACT:

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AWARD RECIPIENT INTERVIEWS ON 26 JANUARY: Interview access during 26 January 2026 will be limited due to travel and functions.

2026 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR



NAME: **KATHERINE BENNELL-PEGG**

Date of birth:	15 December 1984
Lives:	West Beach, Adelaide, South Australia
Place of birth:	Sydney, New South Wales
Education:	Queenwood School for Girls (2002) University of Sydney (2007) Lulea Technical University (2010) Cranfield University (2010) University of Southern Queensland (2024)
	BEng (Hons) Aeronautical (Space) Engineering BSc (Advanced) Physics MSc Space Technology MSc Astronautics and Space Engineering Honorary Award of Doctor of Engineering (Honoris Causa)
Occupation:	Australian Space Agency; Royal Australian Air Force
Languages:	Speaks some Russian and German
Volunteering:	Currently: Surf Life Saving South Australia West Beach Surf Life Saving Club Formerly: NSW SES
Useful links:	https://www.space.gov.au/ https://www.space.gov.au/Katherine-Bennell-Pegg

2026 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR



NAME: **PROFESSOR HENRY BRODATY AO**

Date of birth:	4 July 1947
Lives:	Double Bay, Sydney, New South Wales
Arrived in Australia:	1948 – parents were post-war refugees
Occupation:	Scientia Professor of Ageing and Mental Health and Co-Director of the Centre for Healthy Brain Ageing (CHeBA), University of NSW
Education:	Randwick Boys High (1963) Sydney University (1970)
Volunteering:	Dementia Australia Alzheimer's Disease International Montefiore Homes
Useful links:	www.cheba.unsw.edu.au https://www.sydney.edu.au/medicine/museum/mwmuseum/index.php/Brodaty,_Henry https://www.dementiaresearch.org.au/team/prof-henry-brodaty-ao/ https://www.unsw.edu.au/staff/henry-brodaty https://www.jwire.com.au/nsw-senior-australian-of-the-year/

2026 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR



NAME: **NEDD BROCKMANN**

Date of birth:	11 January 1999
Lives:	Randwick, Sydney, New South Wales
Place of birth:	Forbes, New South Wales
Occupation:	Self-employed
Education:	Kinross Wolaroi School (2016)
Volunteering:	We Are Mobilise Homelessness
Books:	Showing Up (Nedd Brockmann) Fire Up (Nedd Brockmann)
Film:	Runn: Nedd Brockmann
Useful links:	https://neddbrockmann.com/ https://wearemobilise.org.au/ https://www.neddsmiss.com.au/

2026 AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO



NAME: **FRANK MITCHELL**

Date of birth:	13 November 1982
Lives:	Coolbellup, Perth, Western Australia
Place of birth:	Balingup, Western Australia
Occupation:	Business owner: Kardan Construction Wilco Electrical Baldja RSGx Bilyaa Arch&Design
Education:	Donnybrook Senior High School Kalamunda Senior High School (Y12 1999)
Volunteering:	Blazing Swan - Founder, Committee Member, Arts Director https://blazingswan.com.au/
Languages:	Noongar (learning)
Useful links:	https://kardan.net.au/ https://www.wilcoelectrical.com.au/ https://www.baldja.com.au/ https://www.bilyaa.net.au/