

MEDIA RELEASE
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2027 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS: 16 WESTERN AUSTRALIA NOMINEES ANNOUNCED

Australians making an impact across health and medicine, mentoring, community and social support, innovation, marine conservation and science are among the Western Australia nominees announced today for the 2027 Australian of the Year Awards.

Sixteen people from across the state have been named as nominees for the 2027 Australian of the Year Awards for Western Australia, with four nominees recognised in each of the Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year and Australia's Local Hero categories.

Among this year's nominees are a FIFO worker connecting families, a woman saving remote community lives with technology, a mentoring musician, the inventor of portable factories, an architect tackling homelessness, a woman whose simple ocean swim turned into a 30,000 strong community and the longest serving volunteer at Lifeline WA.

The nominees are:

2027 Australian of the Year for Western Australia

Esther Oh - Telehealth innovator (Perth)
Kav Temperley - Musician and mentor (Fremantle)
Professor Michael Wear - Indigenous marine environmentalist (Denham, Shark Bay)
Dr Emily Zhen - Organ transplant pioneer (Perth)

2027 Senior Australian of the Year for Western Australia

Tina Baldwin - Long-serving Lifeline volunteer (Bedford)
Michelle Blakeley - Community housing champion (Perth)
Sheena Edwards - Digital technology mentor (Rockingham)
Professor Charitha Pattiaratchi - World-leading oceanographer (Nedlands)

2027 Young Australian of the Year for Western Australia

Pheobe Ho - Mental health advocate (Perth)
Tara Jeisman - Founder of Sea Gals community group (Perth)
Kurt Krispyn - Marine scientist and communicator (Perth)
Joshua Wigley - 3D-manufacturing innovator (Denmark)

2027 Australia's Local Hero for Western Australia

Adam Desmond - Indigenous community leader (Bellevue)
Michael Elwan - Social worker and mental health advocate (Mandurah)
Victoria (Vicky) Pellowe - FIFO community leader (Perth)
Dr Dayna Pool - Neurological rehabilitation pioneer (Ferndale)

**Detailed nominee biographies follow.*

The Western Australia nominees are among 131 people being recognised across all states and territories in the 2027 Australian of the Year Awards.

National Australia Day Council CEO Carrie Leeson said the nominees for Western Australia were all exceptional in their areas of achievement and contribution.

"The nominees for Western Australia are improving the world we live in today and for the future, whether it is through their grassroots community contributions or their groundbreaking innovations and research," said Ms Leeson.

"They show us what can result when passion, commitment and action are applied to any opportunity or challenge."

The 2027 Western Australia award recipients will be announced on Friday 30 October 2026 in Perth. The ceremony will also be available to watch via livestream at australianoftheyear.org.au

The Western Australia award recipients will then join recipients from the other states and territories as finalists for the national Australian of the Year Awards, announced in Canberra on 25 January 2027.

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Detailed nominee **biographies** follow and are also available at australianoftheyear.org.au.

Photos for download: Photos provided by the nominees for editorial use can be downloaded from here: [Photos Nominees WA \(supplied\)](#) *(please use photo credits where noted on file names)*

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****NOTE****

The Australian of the Year Awards program is run by the National Australia Day Council. This program is delivered in each state and territory, including Western Australia.

The Australian of the Year Awards for Western Australia are NOT connected with an awards program known as the Western Australian of the Year, run by the Celebrate WA organisation.

2027 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Esther Oh

Telehealth innovator

After her son lost his vision due to delayed treatment during COVID-19 lockdown and skills shortages, Esther Oh founded Agili8 to teleport the 'virtual' eyes and hands of multi-disciplinary medical experts – using smart glasses and smartphones – to remote frontline areas.

Despite battling an aggressive cancer, 49-year-old Esther pioneered her telehealth solution with remote Aboriginal communities to deliver a culturally safe model of care. In one instance, a remote patient in Port Hedland was saved from deadly infection and potential amputation in just 15 minutes using Agili8's solution.

Agili8's breakthroughs transcend time, distance, costs, manpower, socio-cultural and language barriers to close the gap for Aboriginal and remote communities. Since 2021, Esther has won multiple global awards for leadership, innovation and impact, including receiving more than \$500,000 as a Google AI Scale Tier company.

Esther's achievements highlight how determination and innovation can transform personal adversity into new technologies that can improve the lives of others in Australia and around the world.

Kav Temperley

Musician and mentor

Kav Temperley's songs have shaped Australian music for almost three decades. He co-founded Eskimo Joe in Fremantle in 1997, and the band has won eight ARIA Awards, two APRA Awards and three International Songwriting Competition Awards, with 11 songs voted into Triple J's Hottest 100. The 2006 hit, *Black Fingernails, Red Wine* spent 62 weeks in the ARIA Top 50.

Kav, 48, has mentored thousands of emerging musicians through his Fremantle studio and songwriting camps, judged the Vanda and Young Global Songwriting Competition, and co-created ArtsiX, a collaborative project bringing together musicians and visual artists, with more than 80 WA creatives staging exhibitions seen by tens of thousands. He has also advocated for songwriters' rights before WA Parliament.

Kav has also supported causes including White Ribbon, Close the Gap and bushfire relief. His contribution over three decades has put Western Australia's music scene on the map, lighting the way for the next generation of performers.

Professor Michael Wear

Indigenous marine environmentalist

Professor Michael Wear is a Malgana man and custodian of the marine environment in the UNESCO World Heritage site at Shark Bay (*Gathaagudu*) in Western Australia.

Over the past three decades of caring for Country, 46-year-old Michael has been instrumental in establishing large-scale marine restoration projects to protect the region's diverse ecosystems. He founded Tidal Moon, an Indigenous-owned and led sea cucumber harvesting enterprise that combines sustainable resource management with research into the health benefits of sea cucumbers.

Drawing on Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices, Tidal Moon together with Murdoch University, is leading a long-term restoration project of the seagrass reserves that play a vital role in sustaining marine biodiversity in Shark Bay. The project also creates much-needed training and employment opportunities for the local community.

Michael's commitment to sustainable environmental practices, combining local Indigenous knowledge with scientific research, is delivering long-lasting benefits to the whole Shark Bay region.

Dr Emily Zhen

Organ transplant pioneer

Dr Emily Zhen, 36, is developing an innovative preservation technology that aims to give transplant recipients the best chance of a successful outcome.

After witnessing a transplant patient die following complications associated with a poorly preserved donor organ, Emily recognised there had to be better ways of transporting organs to maximise their chance of successful transplantation. She founded Materia Health to develop new methods of preserving and protecting donor organs and tissues during transportation.

The company is developing the MateriaPOD, a portable, reusable, precision preservation platform designed to actively control temperature and protect organs, tissues, blood and cells during transport. The MateriaPOD has attracted support from clinicians and collaborators globally and has potential applications beyond transplantation, including emergency and military medicine for blood logistics, and veterinary science for artificial insemination.

Emily's unwavering focus on saving lives is driving genuine change in patient care, with the goal of improving health outcomes for people around the world.

2027 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS**Tina Baldwin**

Long-serving Lifeline volunteer

Tina Baldwin is the longest serving volunteer with Lifeline WA, with more than 40 years of experience providing vital crisis support to people in need.

Tina and her husband, Daniel, started out as Lifeline's first volunteer crisis supporters in Western Australia in the mid-1980s. Since then, she has answered more than 33,000 calls from people in distress needing support. In each case, Tina responds with compassion, openness and a willingness to listen.

Today, Tina applies her experience to mentoring new crisis supporters, helping equip them with the skills and empathy needed to support others. Beyond Lifeline, she volunteers with her local parish church and works as a family liaison officer with Ronald McDonald House. Tina, 78, exemplifies the spirit of volunteering, selflessly dedicating her time to making a lasting difference to thousands of lives.

Michelle Blakeley

Community housing champion

Michelle Blakeley, 71, brings together community groups, the private sector and government agencies to tackle the challenges of long-term homelessness in Western Australia.

An architect by profession, Michelle founded My Home to address homelessness in the state. My Home is a philanthropic housing developer delivering projects on unused sites, providing affordable, secure accommodation for

people who are experiencing homelessness, particularly single parents and young mothers with newborns as well as older women.

The My Home model works by identifying prospective sites, typically government or church-owned land, and using a combination of public and private funding to build low-cost housing. The developments use prefabricated materials that can be quickly and easily installed on site. Local community groups also support the residents when they move in, so they feel at home straight away.

Michelle's championing of My Home has shown how housing inequality can be addressed project by project, bringing hope and dignity to many vulnerable people in need of a secure place to live.

Sheena Edwards

Digital technology mentor

Sheena Edwards, 80, is a passionate advocate for digital inclusion and the belief that no one should be left behind in an increasingly digital world.

As founder and leader of Switched On Seniors, Sheena has spent more than a decade helping older people gain confidence and practical skills to navigate smartphones, tablets and everyday digital life. Her approach is simple but powerful: patient, face-to-face learning, ongoing support and a safe group environment where there are no silly questions.

Under Sheena's leadership, Switched On Seniors has become more than a digital education program. It is a place where older people build friendships, overcome isolation, reconnect with their communities and regain independence in managing their lives.

Sheena's empathy, determination and commitment to lifelong learning are helping challenge the assumption that older people cannot or do not want to engage with technology – demonstrating that with the right support, confidence can grow at any age.

Professor Charitha Pattiaratchi

World-leading oceanographer

Professor Charitha (Chari) Pattiaratchi is recognised as a world-leading authority on oceanography, and his work has been hugely influential in expanding our understanding of how the oceans impact our lives.

Through pioneering research techniques, such as autonomous ocean gliders, Chari has made important discoveries about the behaviour of waves, currents, tides and coastal hazard events such as tsunamis. His research has practical results in improving marine safety and coastal planning as well as predicting how changing ocean conditions affect us all. His understanding of ocean currents led him to successfully predict the landfall of debris from the missing flight MH370.

Alongside his pioneering research, 68-year-old Chari has mentored hundreds of students and scientists through the coastal oceanography group he built at The University of Western Australia.

Like the ocean itself, the scope and depth of Chari's research is vast and sets the standard for oceanography studies across the globe.

2027 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Pheobe Ho

Mental health advocate

Pheobe Ho is using her lived experience to help people with eating disorders recover from debilitating physical and mental conditions.

Pheobe's journey of recovery from an eating disorder as a teenager inspired her to study psychology with a focus on young people and eating disorders. Now a senior clinical psychologist specialising in eating disorders at the Child and Adolescent Health Service, she treats some of Western Australia's most vulnerable young people and supports their families. Her lived experience continues to inform her clinical work and research, including exploring the role it can play as a part of a patient's recovery process.

Alongside her clinical work, Pheobe is a tireless advocate, mentor, public speaker and national policy adviser on a range of eating disorder and broader mental health topics.

Through her work and by sharing the insights of her own story, Pheobe's openness and generosity is an example of selfless dedication to helping others in need.

Tara Jeisman

Founder of Sea Gals community group

What started out as a solo sunrise dip in the ocean for Tara Jeisman has grown into a nationwide movement – Sea Gals – for tens of thousands of women to meet up and go for an ocean dip.

Tara posted online about her solitary swim and was struck by the number of comments from women who wished they could do the same. In response, Tara invited all women to go for a sunrise dip; five women attended that first meet-up and Sea Gals was born.

Today, Sea Gals has 30,000 followers and regularly attracts hundreds of women at morning dips around Western Australia and on the east coast. The aim is to create a safe space where women can feel comfortable, connected and supported. The group also hosts wellness events, raises money for charity and promotes mental health awareness.

Tara, 28, has taken the simple pleasure of going for a dawn dip and created a whole community of fellow swimmers finding support, promoting good mental health and inspiring confidence in each other's company.

Kurt Krispyn

Marine scientist and communicator

Kurt Krispyn is a marine scientist, researcher, published author, educator, filmmaker and presenter working to make science more accessible and meaningful to everyone. Kurt founded Paramount Importance, a science communication platform connecting researchers with the public via podcasts, documentaries, educational films, social media and live experiences.

Alongside his marine research, publications and university teaching, 29-year-old Kurt works with scientists, conservationists and communities to communicate challenging environmental issues in ways that build understanding, encourage informed discussion and strengthen people's connection with nature.

His podcast has reached listeners in more than 100 countries, while his broader work has brought science to millions of people worldwide.

For World Seagrass Day, Kurt created and hosted the world's first live underwater podcast off Rottnest Island, allowing students and the public to interact with scientists beneath the ocean in real time, creating an immersive experience that brought marine science directly to audiences.

Joshua Wigley

3D-manufacturing innovator

Joshua Wigley is the founder and CEO of Hyperion Systems, a Perth-based company that specialises in large format 3D printed manufacturing for industries such as defence, construction, marine and infrastructure. He is at the forefront of a manufacturing revolution that is transforming how components and finished products are made and distributed.

Joshua, 28, has devised an innovative 'factory-in-a-box' model incorporating a portable manufacturing plant that can be moved to wherever it's needed. This means vital parts can be made faster on-site as required without having to set up complex manufacturing facilities.

The 3D printing process also uses recycled plastics which makes it more sustainable and less dependent on imported materials, creating a circular manufacturing process that takes plastic waste and turns it into useful items.

Joshua's innovative thinking is helping transform the future of Australian manufacturing by developing new technologies for faster, more flexible and sustainable production.

2027 AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Adam Desmond

Indigenous community leader

Adam Desmond, 47, founded Binar, Perth's first Indigenous basketball association, 15 years ago with just six young people and a basketball court, creating a safe place for Aboriginal youth to connect, belong and thrive. What began on a Perth basketball court has grown into a thriving Aboriginal community organisation supporting more than 2,500 predominantly Aboriginal children across Western Australia.

Today, Binar provides wraparound support through basketball, education, health, mentoring and cultural identity, creating positive pathways for young people both on and off the court. Its programs extend into schools and regional communities across Western Australia, connecting children with opportunities, services and strong role models.

Binar has also grown into a successful basketball association, becoming the first Aboriginal-led club to enter WA's representative basketball competition.

Adam's vision has always extended beyond sport. Young people who once participated in Binar are now coaches, mentors and leaders themselves – creating a powerful cycle of Aboriginal leadership for the next generation.

Michael Elwan

Social worker and mental health advocate

Michael Elwan works to make mental health care more accessible and culturally responsive, particularly for multicultural communities, carers and families.

As a teenager in Egypt, he cared for his father, who was blind. He later cared for his mother through years of mental health challenges before she died by suicide. Now a Perth-based Accredited Social Worker, Michael founded Lived Experience Solutions. He supports people in English and Arabic, trains practitioners in culturally responsive care, and advises organisations on involving people with lived and living experience in decisions about services.

His community advocacy brings multicultural perspectives into mental health and suicide prevention. Through his practice, training and advisory work, he advocates for care that respects people's culture, circumstances and knowledge.

Michael, 40, was named the Australian Association of Social Workers 2025 Social Worker of the Year. He also received the Outstanding Individual Achievement Award at the 2026 WA Multicultural Awards.

Victoria (Vicky) Pellowe

FIFO community leader

Vicky Pellowe is an advocate for one of Western Australia's most overlooked community groups - the families of fly in, fly out (FIFO) workers. As a former FIFO worker herself and now the at-home parent raising children while her partner works away, Vicky understands the isolation, uncertainty and emotional load the lifestyle can place on families.

In response, she founded and leads The FIFO Family Project, a not-for-profit creating FIFO-specific resources, community connection and advocacy for families in the resources sector. Her FIFO New Parents Guide, co-designed with 42 FIFO families and professionals, is now used by the WA Country Health Service Child, Youth & Family team, including rural and remote communities.

Since May 2024, 39-year-old Vicky has organised more than 50 community meet-ups and events, bringing together over 2,000 FIFO family members across Perth.

Vicky's understanding of her FIFO community is changing how workplaces and support systems sustain healthy families.

Dr Dayna Pool

Neurological rehabilitation pioneer

Dr Dayna Pool, 44, is widely recognised as a leader in neurological rehabilitation whose pioneering work is transforming the treatment of children and young adults living with neurological conditions and injuries.

Dayna founded the Healthy Strides Foundation, a not-for-profit facility that focuses on developing intensive, evidence-based rehabilitation therapies developed on the latest research. Her fundraising and campaigning for the

Foundation resulted in the installation of Australia's first intelligent zero-gravity mobility system to help patients in their rehabilitation treatment. The success of the Healthy Strides approach has seen it also establish clinics in Singapore and Malaysia.

Alongside her clinical practice, Dayna is co-creator of the popular ResearchWorks podcast, focusing on the latest research from clinicians and disability advocates. She is also developing a Healthy Strides Community Hub to support young people with mobility challenges as they transition out of paediatric care.

Dayna's focus on advancing neurological rehabilitation therapies is paving the way for young people and their families to achieve independence and gain meaningful participation in daily life.