Australian of the Year Awards

Reflect. Respect. Celebrate

Victoria

ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE

12 November 2026

2027

MESSAGE FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Victorian Australian of the Year Awards are an opportunity to recognise those whose contributions have made a real difference to our State.

This year's nominees have contributed in many ways. They have supported their communities, advanced their fields and created opportunities for others, and in some cases have had an impact across all these areas.

The value of this work is not only felt across communities but through generations. In recognising this service, we give our thanks to the individuals themselves, but also celebrate the values we collectively admire as a State.

Their achievements reflect the very best of Victoria and remind us of the difference one person can make in the lives of many.

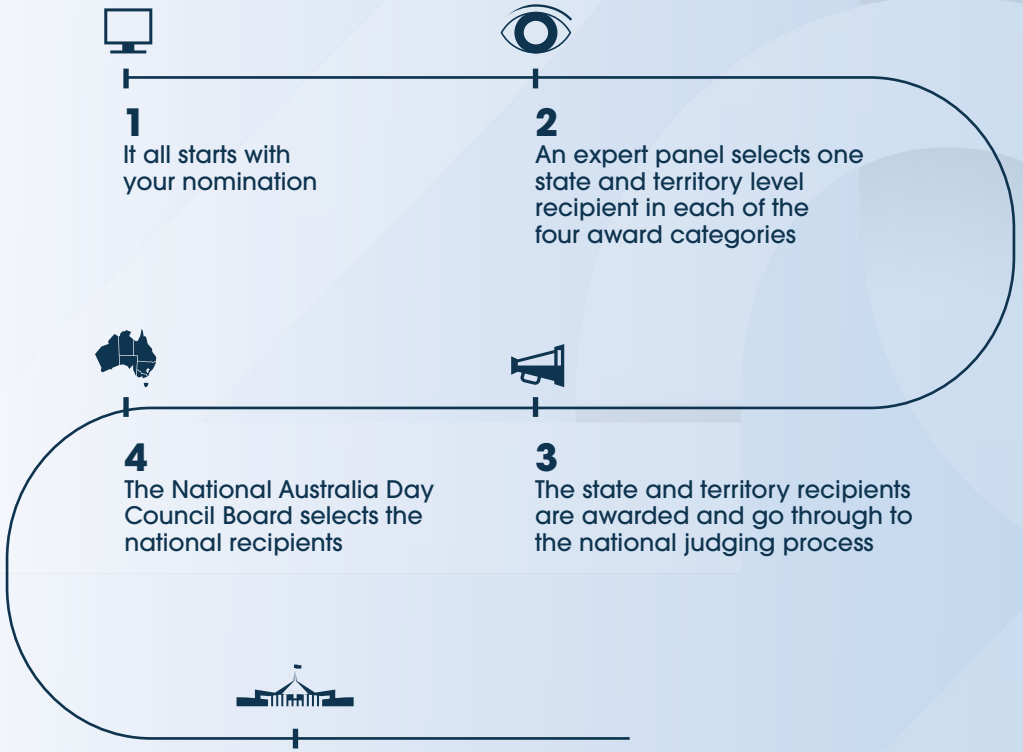
I congratulate every nominee on this well-deserved recognition and offer my best wishes to those progressing to the national awards.

Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC
Governor of Victoria



2027

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

3
The state and territory recipients are awarded and go through to the national judging process

4
The National Australia Day Council Board selects the national recipients

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 latest news and profiles of Australian of the Year Awards nominees, recipients and alumni.

For more information on Australia Day, the Story of Australia campaign 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 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

“Wintringham works with people who society has abandoned. They’re often isolated and lonely and frightened. We feel that they should have access to good quality aged care.”

Bryan Lipmann AM
2026 VIC Senior Australian of the Year

“There’s been some incredible moments in all different areas over the last 10 years... I’d really love to be able to stand up in a few years time and look Australians in the face and go – our country has found a cure for brain cancer.”

Carrie Bickmore OAM
2026 VIC Australian of the Year

“For me, what I’m most motivated about is helping young people from my own community see that here in Australia, they can build a future for themselves. When given a reason to hope, when given an alternative, they can turn their life around.”

Abraham Kuol
2026 VIC Young Australian of the Year

“Aussie Hay Runners is there to help farmers in times of despair. When there’s drought, fire, flood, we’re there to help.”

Linda Widdup
2026 VIC Local Hero



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DAVID CHONG
Volunteer surgeon



Associate Professor David Chong is a plastic and reconstructive surgeon specialising in cleft lip and palate surgery at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. Compelled by his belief that every child deserves access to surgical care, David has volunteered on over 40 missions to the developing world where he conducts facial reconstructions.

David's commitment to global health began in 1996 when he volunteered on Mercy Ships as a young doctor. David now donates two months each year to Mercy Ships and the charity, Operation Smile, performing complex craniofacial surgery, training local clinicians, and strengthening long-term local surgical capacity worldwide – particularly across West Africa and Madagascar.

Children who were accustomed to being ostracised because of how they looked go home from hospital different people after receiving love and care from David, as well as other volunteer doctors and nurses.

A recognised leader in his field, David is the immediate past president of the Australasian Cleft Lip and Palate Association.

CHERIE DEAR
Pancreatic cancer research advocate



Cherie Dear is the tenacious and visionary co-founder of Dare to Hope, a national platform for pancreatic cancer awareness and research.

In July 2022, Cherie lost her husband and co-founder, AFL legend Paul Dear, to pancreatic cancer. Only months later, Cherie's father died from the same disease.

Her grief was surpassed only by indignation towards a cancer that takes the lives of nearly 4,000 Australians each year.

Cherie established the Dare to Hope AFL match, now an annual fixture between Hawthorn and Geelong. The Easter Monday fixture draws more than 80,000 fans and reaches 1.5 million viewers, raising critical funds and awareness. Dare to Hope is the Official Charity Partner of the Hawthorn Football Club.

Now in its fifth year, the volunteer-led organisation funds three research fellowships, testament to Cherie's determination, grit, innovation and leadership in creating national momentum for pancreatic cancer research.

DR ZACH GREIG
Founder, The Stand Up Project



Dr Zach Greig is the founder of The Stand Up Project, a peer-led anti-bullying initiative empowering young people to become active upstanders in their schools and communities.

Zach's commitment to change is deeply personal. As a child, Zach was bullied and he feared going to school. After completing a PhD into power dynamics, Zach applied his lived experience with academic research and practical action to develop The Stand Up Project.

The initiative is student-designed and delivered where thousands of young Australians learn about the bystander effect, the drivers of poor behaviour and age-appropriate ways to challenge harassment. Students then teach these skills to younger peers, teachers and families, embedding evidence-based approaches to shift behaviour.

Zach's leadership is reframing bullying prevention nationally by placing student voice, agency and leadership at the centre of urgently needed cultural change.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JANE TILLER
Preventative DNA screening advocate



Associate Professor Jane Tiller's research and advocacy have fundamentally reshaped Australia's approach to genetics, eliminating genetic discrimination and establishing preventative genomics as a public health priority. Jane believes that no Australian should have to choose between understanding their genetic risks and accessing life insurance. So, for almost a decade, Jane led the national effort to eliminate genetic discrimination – a barrier that deterred Australians from undergoing potentially life-saving genetic testing and participating in medical research.

As co-founder of the Australian Genetic Non-Discrimination Working Group, she united more than 100 organisations and helped secure landmark 2026 legislation that banned the use of genetic test results by life insurers. With at least one in 50 Australians carrying a high-risk gene associated with preventable cancers or cardiovascular disease, Jane is advancing world-first population genomic screening and disease prevention.

Jane demonstrates how one individual, armed with evidence and integrity, can influence policy, protect human rights and improve national health outcomes.

PROFESSOR BRUCE BONYHADY AM
Disability reform pioneer



Professor Bruce Bonyhady is one of the key architects of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and is driven by his passion for equity and inclusion for people with disability.

Two of Bruce's sons have disabilities, and he is acutely aware of the challenges that many people with disability and their families face. His response was to champion a national scheme for disability support based on need that would empower individuals to make their own choices in accessing assistance.

He was the inaugural chair of the National Disability Insurance Agency (2013-16) and co-chair of the NDIS Review (2022-23).

Alongside his foundational work with the NDIS, Bruce has been instrumental in fostering research into disability, first at The Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne and now at the Melbourne Disability Institute.

Bruce's vision and strength of purpose have transformed support for people with disability, and championed new research that will shape the future for generations to come.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR WENN LAWSON
Autistic autism researcher, advocate and author



Associate Professor Wenn Lawson is an autistic autism researcher, British educational psychologist and Australian social worker who has made an important contribution to society's understanding of autism and neurodivergence.

Misdiagnosed with schizophrenia in his teenage years, Wenn spent decades in and out of mental health institutions until he was correctly diagnosed with autism at 42.

For more than 30 years, his lived experience has fuelled his research and advocacy work. Having presented at numerous conferences and published 30 books – as well as three children's books – Wenn's contribution to society's understanding of autism is both nationally and internationally acclaimed.

Wenn has developed guides for autism in Australia and in Europe and created multiple short courses in autism, as well as a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). He has a special interest in exploring the untold histories of older autistic people and is considered a key theorist on autism and monotropism.

IVAN LISTER
Rural outreach worker



Ivan Lister is an experienced rural outreach worker who helps families and communities in regional Victoria face the challenges of living on the land.

Ivan has been an outreach worker for more than two decades – both paid and as a volunteer – talking to farmers, families and the community about mental health issues.

Farmers are often reluctant to ask for help to address mental health concerns and will put off engaging with professional or medical services. Instead, Ivan connects with them informally, over the kitchen table or in the stockyards, holding conversations and building trust. He is well-known throughout rural Victoria as someone to turn to in a crisis such as during times of drought, bushfires and floods.

Ivan's strong commitment to his community has helped many people when they had no one else to turn to; his compassion and understanding providing a means for people to talk about mental health.

PROFESSOR MANJULA DATTA O'CONNOR
Migrant domestic violence campaigner



Professor Manjula Datta O'Connor is the co-founder of the AustralAsian Centre for Human Rights and Health (ACHRH), a pioneering think-tank that leads research into family violence in the South Asian community.

Through her research and public advocacy, Manjula has broken the silence surrounding domestic violence and the impact of dowry abuse on migrant women, helping to instigate legislative and community action. As a result, both state and federal governments have included provisions against dowry-related coercion in family law statutes.

Manjula has worked tirelessly with hundreds of survivors of domestic violence, lobbied politicians, raised awareness with police, social services and the judiciary, and worked on government advisory bodies to further the goal of protecting South Asian women migrants. She is also a highly respected psychiatrist and academic specialising in mental health. Manjula's ground-breaking research and courageous championing of women have delivered genuine change in how domestic violence in migrant communities is perceived and acted upon.

DR KIRSTEN BANKS
Space scientist and communicator



Dr Kirsten Banks is a proud Wiradjuri woman whose ground-breaking work as an astrophysicist and science communicator is blending Indigenous knowledge with the latest space research.

Known online as AstroKirsten, Kirsten has built a significant global audience for her videos about cosmic phenomena, helping to communicate the latest scientific discoveries in an engaging, accessible manner. She has a special focus on Aboriginal astronomy and what it can teach us about First Nations knowledge of space.

Kirsten has a PhD in astrophysics and lectures at Swinburne University of Technology, teaching and mentoring the next generation of physicists. She is a popular public speaker, guide and media presenter, as well as a published author.

Through her research, online presence and public speaking engagements, Kirsten is building bridges between traditional knowledge and modern space exploration, attracting a whole new audience to learn about the wonders of the universe.

RYAN BRIGHAM
Founder, Health in Focus



Ryan Brigham founded Health in Focus (HIF) at 21, a charity delivering healthcare initiatives and education programs in Australia and overseas to ensure everybody has access to basic healthcare support and information.

To date, HIF has engaged more than 800 young volunteers across Australasia, Southeast Asia, and Africa, mobilising more than $500,000 for health initiatives reaching thousands of patients, students and community members in Australia and overseas.

In Victoria, HIF runs mobile cardiac screening clinics offering free heart health assessments to promote early detection of cardiovascular disease. Ryan's endeavours are underscored by his personal experience of years of serious illness, repeated hospitalisations, and more than 10 operations, which have given him an understanding of the need for equitable healthcare access.

Ryan's leadership and vision are providing opportunities for young volunteers to help direct and deliver healthcare programs designed to create genuine change and address healthcare inequity.

SAGALEE OMER
Founder and social impact leader



Sagalee Omer is the founder of Shooters Shoot, a youth-led organisation creating opportunities for young people through sport, culture, education and community initiatives.

Beginning as a grassroots basketball event, Shooters Shoot has grown to engage more than 5,000 young people across its programs and events. Through its charitable initiatives, the organisation has raised over $100,000, distributed more than 400 bicycles and provided more than 200 therapy sessions for young people needing support.

Alongside leading Shooters Shoot, Sagalee works with Foundation House to develop culturally-safe programs for young people from refugee backgrounds. He is also a member of the Refugee Advisory Group for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, contributing to international conversations about refugee inclusion and representation.

Through local action and global advocacy, Sagalee is committed to helping young people access opportunities, build connections and shape stronger, more inclusive communities.

MIKHAEL TOUMA
Interpreter and LGBTQIA+ advocate



Mikhael Touma is the co-founder of Queer Arabs Australia (QAA), a community organisation supporting LGBTQIA+ people from Southwest Asian and North African backgrounds. QAA delivers a range of community services including social events and advocacy.

Drawing on his experience as a certified Arabic interpreter, Mikhael founded and leads the Language Justice Network that delivers safe and affirming language services, training and workshops on ethical interpreting and language access for LGBTQIA+ people with lived experience of forced displacement.

Additionally, Mikhael helped set up Zyara, an Arabic-language social support program specifically designed for LGBTQIA+ refugees and asylum seekers, where members can come together to connect, receive support and share their stories in a welcoming environment without linguistic barriers. He is also a regular speaker at international conferences on language and migration justice. Through his community work, public speaking and work as an interpreter, Mikhael is creating safe spaces for people with similar lived experiences through language and community.

SALLY BEARD
Founder, Backpacks 4 Vic Kids



Sally Beard is the founder of the state-wide charity, Backpacks 4 Vic Kids, that provides essential care packages for thousands of vulnerable children.

Often when children are moved into residential care or foster homes, they may have little of their own to take with them. As a foster carer, Sally was once asked to help a baby wrapped in just a police officer's coat. Realising there was an urgent need to help displaced children, Sally started Backpacks 4 Vic Kids.

Today, the charity offers a range of My Essentials packs containing different items for babies, children and young adults. Since 2014, the charity has delivered more than 60,000 packs to children in out-of-home care throughout Victoria as well as interstate.

Thanks to Sally's tireless work and compassion, Backpacks 4 Vic Kids makes sure that each child is provided with a few essential items to help them feel safe and comfortable at a time of great stress and anxiety.

GAVIN HYNAM
Volunteer car mechanic and mentor



Gavin 'Bear' Hynam is helping young people gain independence and mobility through his Cars 4 Youth gifting program and mentorship of learner drivers.

He donates his time and automotive skills to sourcing second-hand cars, making them roadworthy and then giving them to young people in need of support and transportation.

Gavin also volunteers with Victoria's L2P program that matches mentors with young people without a car or supervising driver, to help them practise driving skills and support them to become confident and safe drivers. Once the learners have gained their licence, Gavin gives them their first car along with six months' registration.

As a result of Gavin's generosity and community spirit, many young recipients in the Wimmera region are now able to go to university, apply for jobs or support their families by having a safe, reliable car.

SHARON MAMO
Clinical innovator and social impact leader



Sharon Mamo is a clinical designer and social justice advocate, challenging how Australia supports vulnerable people.
Born to European wartime orphans, Sharon left school at 15 and experienced homelessness, domestic violence and 25 years of chronic addiction. As a single mother, she struggled to meet welfare requirements while stabilising her family.

After recovering from substance use, she attended university and studied neuroscience, trauma and human behaviour. She recognised that employment services demanded compliance from people who first needed clinical care. Sharon founded Creating New Pathways and later developed SAMMs (Self-Awareness, Motivation and Management) with her daughter, establishing a clinical role for complex needs within employment services. Her principle, stability before capacity, guides her work developing clinical practices and complex needs standards.

She is a strong voice for vulnerable Australians, working to improve the systems and services they rely on. Recognised nationally and internationally, including a 2026 Gold Stevie Award, Sharon has delivered over 38,000 appointments, showing people they mattered.

ROBYN SLATTERY
Delivering affordable veterinary care



Robyn Slattery is helping to deliver essential care for animals in regional Victoria through the not-for-profit veterinary clinic she co-founded to help disadvantaged pet owners. Robyn understands the vital role that pets play in boosting the health and welfare of their owners. Many owners in regional Victoria, however, have difficulty accessing or being able to afford regular preventative healthcare for their pets.

In response, Robyn co-founded the Regional Community Vet Clinic (RCVC), initially running pop-up clinics and, since 2025, from a permanent clinic in Castlemaine. Staffed by volunteers, the clinic provides low-cost services to disadvantaged people with companion animals so the owners can afford to keep their pets healthy. RCVC also provides volunteer-led outreach services, such as dog walking for owners who are physically incapacitated, and they plan to set up a mobile vet service for owners unable to reach the clinic.

Robyn's tireless efforts are bringing hope and reassurance to pet owners who might otherwise be unable to afford regular treatment for their beloved companions.

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 2027 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 2027 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 STATE'S FINEST

Since 1960, the Australian of the Year Awards have recognised people from 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

2026	Carrie Bickmore OAM – Brain cancer fundraiser
2025	Neale Daniher AO – In Memoriam – Co-founder, FightMND and former Australian Rules footballer
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

Senior Australian of the Year

2026	Bryan Lipmann AM – Elderly homeless advocate
2025	Dr Peter Brukner OAM – Sports medicine leader and health campaigner
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

Young Australian of the Year

2026	Abraham Kuol – Mentor and community leader
2025	Aishwarya Kansakar – AI and automation entrepreneur
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 OAM – Co-founder and executive director of Youth Activating Youth

Australia's Local Hero

2026	Linda Widdup – Farming community organiser
2025	Jasmine Hirst – Football advocate for women
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

* 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

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