Australian of the Year Awards

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MEDIA RELEASE
FRIDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2024

2025 AUSTRALIANS OF THE YEAR FOR VICTORIA ANNOUNCED

2025 Australian of the Year for Victoria - Neale Daniher AO (Canterbury)
2025 Senior Australian of the Year for Victoria - Dr Peter Brukner OAM (Malvern)
2025 Young Australian of the Year for Victoria - Aishwarya Kansakar (Southbank)
2025 Local Hero for Victoria - Jasmine Hirst (Preston)

Awards event livestreamed via australianoftheyear.org.au

2025 Australian of the Year Awards recipients for Victoria have been announced at a ceremony in Melbourne this evening.

The Victoria recipients will join those from the other states and territories for the national awards to be announced on 25 January 2025.

The 2025 Australian of the Year for Victoria is former Australian rules footballer and co-founder of FightMND, Neale Daniher AO.

Neale Daniher AO is a former Australian rules player for the Essendon Football Club where at age 21, he was its youngest captain. Neale won widespread praise and accolades for his actions both on and off the field.

In 2013, Neale was diagnosed with motor neurone disease (MND), a debilitating disease that takes away someone's use of their arms and legs, then their ability to eat, speak and breathe.

Since diagnosis, Neale's been a tireless campaigner in the fight for a cure, co-founding the charity, Fight MND. Over 10 years, Neale has raised millions to help prevent the suffering of those diagnosed with MND in the future – and is often front and centre at the Big Freeze charity event held each year.

Even in his advanced stages, 63-year-old Neale has never shied away from the public eye and with his courage and relentless drive, remains dedicated to raising awareness and money for medical research.

Sports medicine leader and health campaigner, Dr Peter Brukner OAM, is the 2025 Senior Australian of the Year for Victoria.

Dr Peter Brukner OAM profoundly inspired a generation of sports medicine practitioners, co-authoring the widely used textbook, *Clinical Sports Medicine.*

Peter founded the largest sports medicine centre in Australia: Olympic Park Sports Medicine Centre in Melbourne and is a founding member of the Australasian College of Sports Physicians, where he played a vital role in developing and recognising sports medicine as a full medical specialty.

As Professor of Sports Medicine at Latrobe University, he established the La Trobe Sport and Exercise Medicine Research Centre, a world-leading research centre in sports medicine.

After his own health issues, 72-year-old Peter established the not-for-profit SugarByHalf, which has produced far-reaching lessons for schoolchildren on the adverse effects of excessive added sugar. He wrote the best-selling books, *A Fat Lot of Good* and *The Diabetes Plan*, and founded Defeat Diabetes, an app- and web-based program endorsed by Diabetes Australia that aims to send type 2 diabetes into remission.

The 2025 Young Australian of the Year for Victoria is AI and automation entrepreneur, Aishwarya Kansakar.

Aishwarya Kansakar is a globally renowned AI and automation entrepreneur, not-for-profit executive, STEM education innovator and an automation engineer who speaks six languages. Raised amidst Nepal's civil war, she survived an arson attack at school but went on to teach herself computing, launching her career.

At 29, Aishwarya now heads Syncrowin, building a world-first AI-powered automation system. Concurrently, as Women 4 STEM's chief operating officer, she leads 300 volunteers, impacting 70 schools and 66,000 women's STEM careers.

In 2024, Aishwarya pioneered a world-first STEM teaching model backed by $3.2million in funding. Today, the model is nominated for the prestigious Yidan Prize, impacting 2,700 educators and 40,000 girls. Digital Innovation Futures Victoria named Aishwarya as one of Victoria's top women in STEM.

In 2022, Aishwarya became one of the youngest to be inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women and was awarded the Women in Digital 2021 Rising Star of the Year.

Jasmine Hirst, football advocate for women, is the 2025 Local Hero for Victoria.

Over the last 15 years, Jasmine Hirst has given hundreds of girls and women the opportunity to play soccer.

Jasmine launched the Darebin Falcons Women's Sports Club junior girls' soccer program with just one team in 2011. Fast forward to the 2024 season, Jasmine has made possible over 30 junior and senior soccer teams and enabled more than 550 females to play soccer, including the largest girl-exclusive MiniRoos and MiniTillies programs in Victoria.

Jasmine's tireless efforts have given females access to scarce local facilities, grounds and equipment – creating Australia's biggest soccer program for girls and women. In 2020, Jasmine launched the young referees program to increase the number of female referees in Victoria and to pay them for their services.

One of Australia's few female soccer administrators, 50-year-old Jasmine's trailblazing work has had a profound influence on growing football participation rates across Australia and an extraordinary impact on girls and women's sport.

National Australia Day Council CEO Mark Fraser AO CVO congratulated the recipients for Victoria.

"The Victorian award recipients are inspirational in their achievements and dedication, and we look forward to welcoming them to Canberra," said Mark.

"Neale's strength and courage have captured people's hearts and brought the fight against MND to the forefront; Dr Brukner continues to educate people on critical health issues; Aishwarya is changing the STEM education and digital world; and Jasmine is empowering women on and off the football field."

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards, visit australianoftheyear.org.au.

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MEDIA CONTACT: Nicole Browne on 0414 673 762 / nicole@mediaopps.com.au

PHOTOS: From the awards announcement event can be downloaded as available after approx. 9:30pm Melbourne time from this link (credit NADC/Salty Dingo): VIC Media Distribution photos - High res