Australian of the Year Awards

Reflect. Respect. Celebrate

Australian Capital Territory

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA

11 November 2026

2027

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF MINISTER

Each year, the Australian of the Year Awards shine a spotlight on Australians whose dedication, leadership and service make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

The awards provide an opportunity to celebrate those who enrich our community through their actions, achievements and commitment to building a better future. They remind us of the extraordinary difference one person can make and the lasting impact individuals have across our community.

Today, we are proud to recognise 16 exceptional Canberrans, selected from a diverse and inspiring field of nominees from across the ACT. Each has demonstrated an outstanding dedication to helping others and strengthening our community.

Among this year's nominees are advocates, volunteers, humanitarians, entrepreneurs and community leaders. While their contributions are diverse, they share a common desire to serve others. Through their vision, determination and generosity, they have created positive change, strengthened connections and inspired those around them.

I would also like to acknowledge our outgoing 2026 ACT Australians of the Year: Professor Rose McGready, Ms Heather Reid AM, Ms Sia Sargeant and Mr Ben Alexander. Over the past year, they have represented the ACT with distinction, generosity and purpose. We thank them for their service and for the example they continue to set for our community.

As we celebrate today's nominees and recipients, we recognise not only their achievements to date, but also the positive impact they will continue to have in the years ahead. Their dedication, leadership and service embody the very best of the ACT and inspire us all to contribute to a stronger, more connected community.

Andrew Barr MLA
Australian Capital Territory
Chief Minister



2027



"I've used my voice wherever possible to advocate for equitable rights for women and girls [in football] – to have things such as the World Cup and the Olympic Games come in and be available for women."

Heather Reid AM
2026 ACT Senior Australian of the Year

"By looking at the past and not only recognising the women who have shaped history but the fact that it was a diverse group of women who have shaped this country. You can write a better future."

Sita Sargeant
2026 ACT Young Australian of the Year

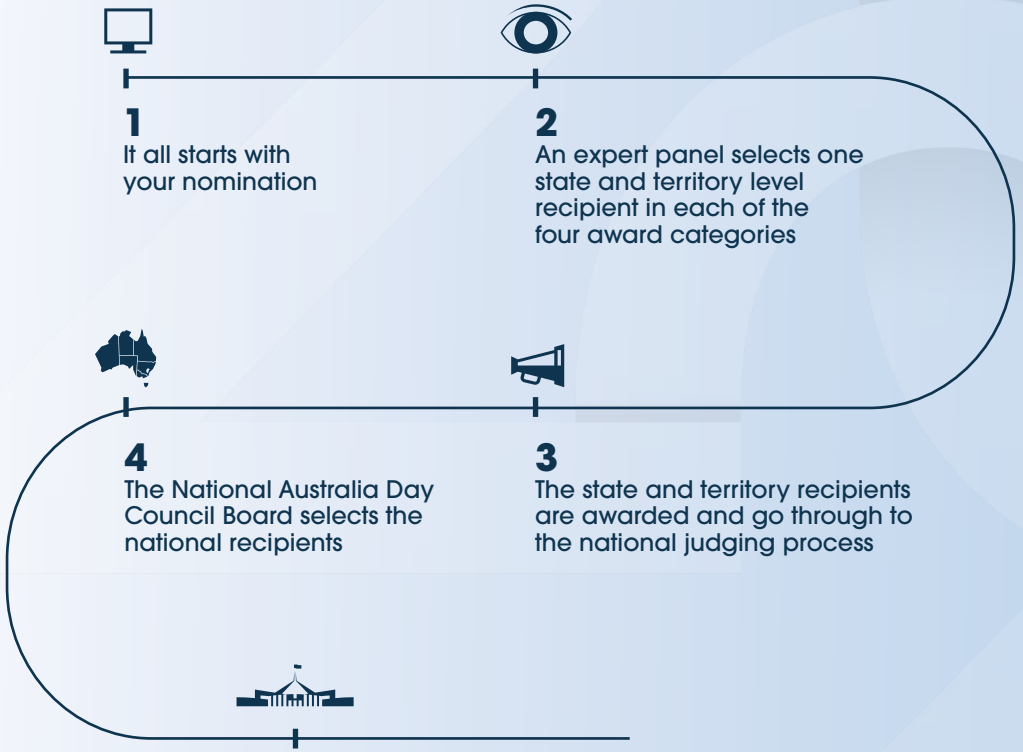
"This work means so much to me but also the people that I work with. They're all as passionate. They're all working so hard to try to reduce mortality, keep malaria at bay. It feels meaningful to be able to support it."

Professor Rose McGready
2026 ACT Australian of the Year

"The big thing I've learnt through Running for Resilience, is that we will all go through tough patches in life, it is normal – we will have really hard things happen to us in life and there's absolutely no shame in that. You do not have to go through it alone."

Ben Alexander
2026 ACT Local Hero

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



PROFESSOR HILARY BAMBRICK
Climate impact advocate

Professor Hilary Bambrick is an environmental epidemiologist and bioanthropologist who researches how climate change affects human health, especially in vulnerable communities.

Contributing regularly to media and public debate, Hilary's work explains how changes in heat, water, food and air reshape the relationship between people and their environment. Critically, Hilary spotlights why the health impacts from heatwaves, infectious diseases and food insecurity fall hardest on the world's poor. Hilary has advised governments in Australia and overseas, worked with the World Health Organization and the United Nations Development Programme, and led major national and regional climate health assessments. Hilary also served as an expert witness in the historic Queensland Land Court decision that rejected coal mine expansion. The ruling cited potential impacts on the health and human rights of First Nations peoples, children and young people.

In bringing evidence to action, Hilary helps Australians understand climate risks and the practical adaptation strategies needed to build healthier, more resilient communities.



DR KAREN DEMMERY
Trauma recovery champion

Dr Karen Demmery, a proud Wiradjuri woman, channels her culture, resilience and lived experience into transformative leadership. After leaving school in Year 9 and facing addiction, instability and encounters with the justice system, Karen rebuilt her life from the ground up. She went on to complete two diplomas, postgraduate qualifications in trauma and recovery, a Masters of Indigenous Health and a PhD.

Over more than two decades, Karen has become a respected specialist in trauma, healing, coaching, facilitation and cultural practice. She founded Burbirra, a consulting and counselling business, and Spirit Hive, a not-for-profit supporting people at risk of suicide, self harm and mental illness.

Karen helps women reclaim identity, heal deeply and achieve economic independence. The ripples of her impact leave every community and every woman she works with stronger than she found them.



JASMINE FELLOWS
Science editor

Jasmine Fellows has spent more than 20 years making science accessible and easier for everyone to understand. As a journalist and editor, she crafts national STEM publications that reach more than a million people each year, including Careers with STEM, Australian University Science and Science Meets Business.

Jasmine played a pivotal role in launching Careers with STEM: Primary, Australia's first STEM careers magazine for students in years 3 to 6, helping children imagine futures in science. Reaching students across Australia, Jasmine's work connects young people with science and technology pathways, while also supporting educators and parents.

Through her editorial work, Jasmine has helped close critical gaps in STEM education and demonstrates how people from diverse backgrounds can succeed in high-level science roles. Jasmine is building a more STEM-literate Australia while also equipping a new generation of students to think critically, dismantle misinformation and see a future in STEM careers.



MARTIN HODGSON
Human rights advocate

Martin Hodgson has spent more than 20 years advocating for human rights. He has represented over 500 clients pro bono across more than 30 countries through his work with The Disappeared Project and the Foreign Prisoner Support Service.

Through his work, Martin has supported First Nations people, vulnerable Australians, the Bali Nine and journalist Peter Greste. Martin's fearless advocacy has secured fair treatment, justice and, in some cases, release or repatriation.

Recognised for his integrity, resilience and compassion, Martin works closely with communities affected by violence and systemic injustice. His persistence is exemplified by his successful advocacy for First Nations man, Kevin Henry who was wrongfully imprisoned in Queensland for more than 25 years.

Through national and international media, publications and the podcast, *Curtain*, Martin raises awareness of injustice and drives accountability. As an expert in international law and human rights, he continues to lead legal teams, support families in crisis and push for systemic reform.

DR NEAL FOGARTY
Rotary volunteer



Dr Neal Fogarty has made an extraordinary voluntary contribution to Australian society through his work over four decades with Rotary, where he turned service into measurable community impact.

Neal's ability to motivate volunteers into effective teams to convert goodwill into action has been evident throughout his Rotary career. When Neal served as district governor of Rotary International District 9700, he guided Rotary clubs to deliver approximately 67,500 volunteer hours and raise $1.3 million for local and overseas projects. As president of the Rotary Club of Murrumbidgee Canberra, Neal led the club in hosting a mother and baby from Tonga for extended medical treatment. Together, the club provided care, advocacy and emotional support throughout a complex medical journey.

Under Neal's leadership, the club also funded a three-year PhD scholarship for research into children's leukemia at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute. Neal believes that community service must address immediate hardship while also investing in long-term solutions.

DR ANDRZEJ KILIAN
Scientist and inventor



Dr Andrzej Kilian is expanding the diversity and nutritional quality of food across the world by making advanced genetic technology both affordable and accessible.

In 2001, Andrzej founded the Canberra-based social enterprise, Diversity Arrays Technology (DArT), to commercialise his breakthrough invention: a fast, cost-effective method of analysing the DNA of virtually any organism. Doing so gives farmers, scientists and ecologists invaluable data that improves crop productivity. Beginning with two people and limited funding, DArT has grown into an internationally recognised genomics and technology enterprise, supporting farm yields, biodiversity and conservation. DArT keeps its services affordable, undertaking work pro bono or at below cost.

Andrzej is deeply affected by the injustice of children dying from hunger and the problem of communities suffering poor health from inadequate food nutrition. His vision is to match crops to the environments in which they will thrive, reduce dependence on chemical use and improve global food security.

JOHN RILEY
Riding for the disabled coach



John Riley has brought joy, social connection and empowerment to many people living with disabilities through his volunteer work with the charity, Pegasus Riding for the Disabled.

Pegasus has been operating for more than 50 years in the ACT, delivering horse-assisted programs to help children and adults with disability develop confidence, physical prowess and social skills. John joined Pegasus as a volunteer at a challenging time in his life after the loss of his son. Initially drawn by a desire to work with horses, he soon found that it was the participants who most inspired him.

John qualified as a coach and, over the past 12 years, has made an immense contribution across all aspects of the organisation, not just with guiding participants but also looking after the herd, sourcing new horses and mentoring new volunteers and coaches.

John's knowledge, compassion and selfless devotion to helping others highlights the positive difference one individual can make to a whole community.

CHRISTINE WARREN
Founder, Sassy Seniors



When Christine Warren posted a simple Facebook invitation for anyone aged over 70 to join her for coffee and conversation, she started something far larger than she could ever have imagined. Christine's small gesture was the genesis of the community group, Sassy Seniors.

As the number of participants grew, Christine realised how many people in Canberra had lost their social networks and needed a place to connect. A newly refurbished cafe in Kambah hosted the first gathering of around 30 people in May 2024.

What began as a weekly morning tea has grown into a thriving community built on kindness, friendship and genuine care. Christine hasn't just brought people together; she has given them the priceless gift of knowing they matter, they belong, and they are missed when they're absent.

Sassy Seniors is now a community where newcomers are embraced, strangers become friends and no one faces life's challenges alone.

KAITLYN FARQUHAR
Social justice advocate



Kaitlyn Farquhar is a youth advocate and community leader. At age 19, Kaitlyn founded Dreamscape, an inclusive tutoring initiative that has supported more than 200 differently-abled students, many of whom have progressed to university.

As a board member and communications officer for the National Council of Women Australia, she contributes to national governance and helps amplify advocacy for women and gender equality. Through her leadership roles and projects with organisations such as Bravehearts, Just Governance, Youth Decide, Sydney Alliance and What Were You Wearing?, Kaitlyn works to strengthen the voices of young people and communities facing vulnerability or exclusion.

She convenes youth roundtables and advocacy initiatives across more than four states, bringing young people together to share their experiences, engage with decision-makers and shape responses to issues affecting their communities. Her work spans child safety, gender-based violence, inclusive governance and youth participation, turning community insight into meaningful advocacy and change.

ZAKARY PINO
Loneliness changemaker



Zakary Pino leads a movement that has lifted thousands of Canberrans out of loneliness and into genuine connection.

In 2021, facing anxiety and loneliness, Zakary started Sunday morning walks around Lake Burley Griffin. At first, he walked alone, until word spread and others gradually joined him. Over five years, that weekly walk grew into WITH-ME, a charity connecting more than 2,000 people of all ages. Today it offers walking, running, yoga and cooking sessions to people from all walks of life.

Zakary's work was highlighted as a case study in a submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly's Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation. He recently contributed to research on adolescent loneliness with Adelaide University's Australian Research Centre for Interactive and Virtual Environments. He speaks openly about anxiety and mental health with school students across Canberra, bringing these struggles into the open.

He proves connection begins with one person willing to show up and keep showing up.

LAURA PRINCE
Child poverty prevention advocate



Laura Prince turned a childhood marked by financial hardship and housing instability into a lifelong dedication to youth education and advocacy. Growing up as a young carer for two siblings with significant disabilities, Laura experienced first-hand how severe medical and financial pressures impact a child's educational journey.

Today, Laura channels those challenges into tangible community leadership. While studying early childhood and primary education, Laura serves as a vital mentor at the Daydream Machine STEM program. There, she supports and advocates for neurodivergent youth to feel safe, capable, and included.

Nationally, Laura is a prominent ambassador for The Smith Family's Learning for Life program – which supported her own education, has given back to local young carer programs and has been a voice for the End Child Poverty campaign. Laura met with parliamentarians at Parliament House to champion rights and opportunities for thousands of disadvantaged children across Australia.

JEMMA RULE
Youth advocate



At just 18 years old, Jemma Rule was elected as the youngest-ever director of the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and has quickly become a national voice for young people. Now chair of the board, Jemma leads the peak body representing more than 4.7 million young Australians.

A proud Māori-Australian, Jemma co-founded Pacific Youth Voice Australia to strengthen advocacy and connection among Pacific young people. Her leadership extends globally as a curator and 'global shaper' with the World Economic Forum, and locally as vice president of the ANU Pasifika Student Association.

Jemma has shaped policy and social equity initiatives through Plan International Australia, Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT, the ANU Students' Association, ANU Queer* Department and the Australian Government's Prevention of Gender-Based Violence Youth Advisory Group.

Drawing on her lived experience, Jemma champions inclusive decision-making and mentors young people to lead with confidence, compassion and purpose.

ADRIANE BOAG
Accessible art programs producer



In her role as program producer at the National Gallery of Australia, for 20 years Adriane Boag used her passion and expertise in visual arts to enrich the lives of people living with dementia and their carers, young people, people with a disability and other marginalised groups.

Across a myriad of programs, Adriane made art more inclusive, bringing its social and mental health benefits to a wide audience. She contributed to creating the National Gallery's renowned program now known as Art and Dementia. Over 40 Australian galleries have since joined the ranks offering similar programs.

Adriane was also instrumental in fostering a love of art online, including through Art and Dementia – Making It, and an online element of the National Summer Art Scholarship (for Year 11 students across the country) during COVID-19.

Always championing innovative ways to connect more people with art, Adriane was a co-convenor for the Know My Name conference in 2020.

DR SARAH BOMBELL
Obstetrician and lactation consultant



Dr Sarah Bombell is the owner and medical director of The Mother Hub, a Canberra clinic providing a unique model of integrated healthcare for mothers, babies and families.

The Mother Hub opened in 2021 as a 'one-stop-shop' enabling families to access a range of healthcare services spanning pregnancy, birth, early childhood and family GP care. The multidisciplinary team includes GPs, GP obstetricians, lactation consultants and a maternal and child health nurse, alongside allied health professionals including a perinatal psychologist, midwife-counsellor, acupuncturist and osteopaths. This model enables families to access coordinated care in one location.

Earlier this year, The Mother Hub was named as one of only three Australian Community-based health agencies to receive the International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) Care Award, recognising organisations that provide excellence in lactation care and breastfeeding support and promote and support the work of IBCLCs. Sarah's passion for looking after families and commitment to providing quality care is helping to give mothers and babies in Canberra the best possible start to life.

MICAELA CENTENERA
Motherhood and community champion



Micaela Centenera is a champion for mothers and community. She touches people's lives as co-founder of The Little Capsule Co. (TLCco), creator of Mumma Mingle, and deputy chair of the Canberra Circle of Women.

TLCco is a social enterprise with an environmental and social purpose. Through TLCco, Micaela and her friend and business partner, Jane, keep children's clothes in circulation for longer, while raising money for research into maternal health – all through the sale of new and pre-loved childrenswear.

At the heart of TLCco is Micaela and Jane's mission to create a free community for women in Canberra. Sales from TLCco fund their mother's group, Mumma Mingle, which has brought together 2,100 mums and mums-to-be over one year.

Through her work with the Canberra Circle of Women, Micaela's impact also extends as far as the Philippines, where she sends around 20 large boxes of medical supplies, clothing, bedding and toiletries to families in extreme poverty every month.

NATE SWIFT
Community cafe owner



Nate Swift had never worked in a cafe but knew the local coffee shop could be a powerful vehicle for community connection and social change.

From humble beginnings, Nate transformed café Little Luxton from a crowd-funded coffee cart into a thriving hub.

Based at the Gordon Community Centre, one dollar from every coffee goes back into local community programs. In partnership with local schools, young people are given the opportunity to complete a seven-week work experience program, or a one-off introductory barista course, at no cost to the family or school.

The cafe now serves more than 200 people a day and has raised over $180,000 for local initiatives. More than 25 young people have received mentoring and practical hospitality skills through its youth training program.

Collaborations with Gordon Community Centre, T25 Clinic, The Man Walk, and Men's Table have all resulted in additional grass-roots community development opportunities through the cafe.

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 TERRITORY'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 the Australian Capital Territory for the past five years. The full honour roll can be viewed at **australianoftheyear.org.au**

Australian of the Year

2026	Professor Rose McGready – Migrant and refugee health expert
2025	Megan Gilmour – Co-founder, MissingSchool
2024	Joanne Farrell – Founder, Build Like A Girl
2023	Olympia Yarger – Insect farming pioneer and founder, Goterra
2022	Patrick Mills AM – Basketball player and Indigenous rights advocate

Senior Australian of the Year

2026	Heather Reid AM – Football pioneer
2025	Marilyn Ralston and Peter Ralston OAM – Running supporters of the vision impaired
2024	Ebenezer Banful OAM – Volunteer and multiculturalism advocate
2023	Professor Tom Calma AO – Human rights and social justice advocate
2022	Valmai Dempsey – Volunteer at St John Ambulance

Young Australian of the Year

2026	Sita Sargeant – Historian and guide
2025	Daniel Bartholomaeus – Artist and advocate for neurodivergent individuals
2024	Caitlin Figueiredo – Co-chair, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition
2023	Kofi Owusu-Ansah – Award-winning performer and songwriter
2022	Sean Dondas – Former Board Director at CanTeen

Australia's Local Hero

2026	Ben Alexander – Mental health advocate
2025	Vanessa Brettell and Hannah Costello – Co-founders, Cafe Stepping Stone
2024	Selina Walker – Co-chair, ACT Reconciliation Council
2023	Dr Shamaruh Mirza – Scientist and co-founder, SiTara's Story
2022	Luke Ferguson – Youth support worker at The Woden School

* 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

OFFICE FOR YOUTH

Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

ABC

ACM

Australian National University

EAST HOTEL

national museum australia

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