Australian of the Year Awards

Reflect. Respect. Celebrate

New South Wales

THE CALYX, ROYAL BOTANIC GARDEN SYDNEY

4 November 2026

2027

MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER

Every day across New South Wales, ordinary Australians are doing extraordinary things.

The 2027 New South Wales Australian of the Year Awards are a chance to recognise and celebrate these outstanding contributions.

This year's nominees represent the very best of New South Wales – everyday heroes doing exceptional work in our science labs, on our sporting fields, in our classrooms, and in service of their communities.

Across these diverse fields, each nominee is driven by a commitment to making a difference. Through their courage, generosity and service, they have reshaped their communities and enriched our state.

These Awards are an opportunity to say 'thank you' and to give recipients a platform to make an even greater impact.

To everyone who submitted a nomination, thank you for shining a light on these remarkable people and their work.

To our nominees, please take tonight as a sign of how much you are valued and respected by your communities.

On behalf of the people of New South Wales, congratulations to all the nominees and award recipients.

I wish our recipients all the best as you represent our state at the national ceremony for the Australian of the Year Awards on Australia Day eve.

Thank you for making New South Wales and Australia a better place. You are an inspiration to us all.

Chris

The Hon Chris Minns MP
Premier of the State of New South Wales in the Commonwealth of Australia



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



“Agape means ‘unconditional love’ – a sacrificial love that transcends and persists, regardless of circumstance. Agape is a steppingstone back to a normal life.”

Theresa Mitchell
2026 NSW Local Hero

“Dementia has been an area of darkness. We shouldn’t protest about the darkness; we should light a candle. I would like to inspire people to think about their brain health throughout their life.”

Professor Henry Brodaty AO
2026 Senior Australian of the Year

“The one message I’d like people to take away from our platform (Third Wave Volunteers) really is that everyone is needed. Service to others, it will change your life.”

Dr Alison Thompson OAM
2026 NSW Australian of the Year

“It feels a thousand times better to give than take. And I truly, truly believe that, how much do we need? No one chooses to be homeless and no one deserves to be either. It’s deeply rooted in me to make sure this ends.”

Nedd Brockmann
2026 Young Australian of the Year

TABITHA ACRET
Domestic violence campaigner



Tabitha Acret's campaigning on behalf of families affected by domestic violence has achieved tangible results with new mandatory sentencing in New South Wales for offenders convicted of murdering their partners.

Tabitha's daughter, Mackenzie Anderson, was murdered by her former boyfriend in a domestic violence incident in 2022. In the wake of the tragedy, Tabitha campaigned for judicial reform in domestic violence cases to better reflect the seriousness of the offence. As a result of her advocacy, in 2025, New South Wales introduced Australia's first standard 25-year non-parole period for intimate partner homicide.

Alongside her campaign for sentencing reform, Tabitha is a tireless supporter of domestic violence survivors, helping to raise awareness and improve community and government responses.

Tabitha's courage and determination after the heartbreaking loss of her daughter has given a voice to families affected by domestic violence and offers hope that real change can be achieved.

CLYDE CAMPBELL AM
Parkinson's disease campaigner



Clyde Campbell has transformed research into Parkinson's disease in Australia through his work with the Shake It Up Australia Foundation.

Clyde was diagnosed with Parkinson's when he was 44 years old and it changed his life. It launched him on a remarkable journey of campaigning and fundraising on behalf of people living with Parkinson's.

Clyde set up the Shake It Up Australia Foundation in 2011 with the goal of funding research to find improved therapies and, ultimately, a cure for Parkinson's. Since then, more than $40 million has been raised for 24 institutions to fund research into the disease. Clyde funds the administration costs of the organisation himself, ensuring that all donations go towards research efforts.

Clyde's leadership and generosity of spirit have inspired a community of researchers, clinicians, donors and volunteers to work together in advancing treatments and knowledge of the condition.

DWAYNE FERNANDES
Disability advocate



Dwayne Fernandes is a person with a disability and advocate whose work championing inclusion and removing barriers to accessibility is improving the lives of the disability community. As a speaker, educator, mentor and leader, Dwayne has transformed how entire organisations view disability access, not as an obligation but as a positive contribution to workplace culture.

His achievements are wide-ranging: an elite vertical marathon runner; the co-founder of Minds at Play, online social groups that help build communication skills and social confidence in the disability community; and an ambassador for AstroAccess which promotes inclusion in space flights, demonstrating that disability access belongs everywhere.

Above all, Dwayne connects on a human level, helping people get the resources they need, find hope and explore new possibilities. He also volunteers his time to support disability leadership by offering practical advice and guidance. Dwayne's compassion, drive and selfless advocacy are delivering fundamental changes that affect countless people and help to create a more equitable society.

DR VANESSA PIROTTA
Marine scientist and communicator



Dr Vanessa Pirotta is a well-known marine scientist who uses her passion for the ocean to engage Australians in conservation.

As a renowned whale researcher, Vanessa has pioneered innovative ways to assess whale health (whale snot) using drones. She is the founder of Wild Sydney Harbour, a citizen science project that seeks to document the diversity of marine life found in Sydney Harbour. She works alongside the traditional custodians on Gamay (Botany Bay), the Gamay Rangers, to monitor marine populations. A strength of her work is a commitment to recognising the importance of First Nations cultural knowledge.

Vanessa is a popular science communicator and champions conservation messages across generations in her books, public appearances and school outreach programs. She is also a strong advocate for having more women in STEAM subjects. Through her research, conservation work and science communication, Vanessa inspires and mentors young women to follow a career in science.

MICHAEL BROSNAN OAM
Co-founder, Social Justice Advocates



Since retiring, Michael (Mick) Brosnan has dedicated himself to restoring dignity, safety and hope to people experiencing hardship, driven by a deep concern about homelessness and growing inequity.

A foundation member of the Rotary Club of Pambula and co-founder of Social Justice Advocates of the Sapphire Coast (SJA), Mick brought hundreds of volunteers together around a simple philosophy: “What can I do? How may I help?”

His service stretches from the Bega Valley to Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea, building shelters, sanitation and teacher housing and providing crisis accommodation, furniture and practical support. Through SJA, more than 500 people have received over 12,000 nights of safe accommodation.

Following the devastating 2019–20 bushfires, Mick helped provide household essentials and 85 caravans to affected families. His ‘It’s Up To Us’ campaign has since raised more than $700,000 to create sustainable, dignified crisis and transitional housing for people in need. After many years as the SJA Chair, Mick is now an SJA executive member and convener of the housing/homeless sub group.

DR DAVID COOKE OAM
Pilot doctor



For more than six decades, Dr David Cooke has dedicated his life to caring for patients in remote and regional Australia.

David’s remarkable career is founded on his dual passions: medicine and aviation. As part of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, David provided care across vast and isolated parts of the Northern Territory and north Queensland. Working with little access to diagnostic technology, he relied on clinical judgement and resourcefulness to diagnose and treat patients in some of Australia’s most challenging environments. A self-described ‘pilot who practises medicine,’ David even trained in parachute jumping to reach patients in inaccessible locations.

After settling in Port Macquarie in 1988, David became one of the region’s most respected doctors, known for his skill, humour and deep humanity. Now well into his 80s, David continues to care for patients in Port Macquarie and South West Rocks, helping address the critical shortage of general practitioners in the region.

EMERITUS PROFESSOR MARK HARRIS AO
Pro bono doctor to asylum seekers



Emeritus Professor Mark Harris has provided free medical care to refugees and people seeking asylum for over 25 years.

In 2000, Mark was concerned that people were not receiving the health care they needed simply because their visa restrictions made them ineligible for Medicare. In response, Mark established a medical clinic at the Asylum Seekers Centre initially staffed by himself and one part-time nurse. For more than two decades, Mark has volunteered weekly as a general practitioner, providing essential care to people who would otherwise receive none.

The Asylum Seekers Centre now delivers 500 medical appointments, 485 nursing appointments and 200 physiotherapy appointments each year, supporting around 800 patients. Mark also initiated and personally funded the Health Navigator Program, training health navigators who accompany and support asylum seeker patients through Australia’s complex health system. Mark’s work provides care and dignity for thousands of people facing profound hardship and uncertainty.

PROFESSOR HOSEN KIAT
Leading cardiologist and educator



Professor Hosen Kiat has made a significant contribution to the health of thousands of Australians through his pioneering research work that has transformed how heart disease is diagnosed and treated.

Hosen is a world-renowned cardiologist recognised for his personal care and treatment of patients. He is a leading researcher in cardiac imaging, preventative medicine and healthy ageing; a mentor for the next generation of medical practitioners; and a popular science educator, using his online reach to explain complex scientific and medical topics to a broad audience.

In his many professional roles at medical institutions and universities, Hosen’s work continues to have a daily impact on cardiac patients and the wider public across the globe. He inspires doctors and patients alike with his engaged, compassionate approach to improving the lives of others, and his staunch belief in the value of evidence-based research in furthering innovative approaches to healthy living.

DARIAN BROOKER
Children's rights advocate



Darian Brooker channels her experience in foster care into supporting thousands of young people through academic tutoring, mentoring and wellbeing programs.

Entering foster care at eight years old and changing schools 26 times, Darian faced instability and disrupted learning. Today, Darian advocates for the voices of children and young people and child safety – proving how one person's resilience can help others.

In 2017, Darian founded We, Future Leaders, without external capital, growing from a solo tutoring initiative into an enterprise employing more than 50 staff and helping over 4,000 students. With a learning hub in Kirrawee, Darian is a role model for young female founders.

Darian partners with Ronald McDonald House Charities and the NSW Department of Communities and Justice to deliver fully subsidised tutoring and wellbeing programs for seriously ill children and young people in out of home care. Darian also speaks to thousands of students each year to show how today's adversity doesn't limit tomorrow's opportunities.

MICHAELA LOUKAS
Medical innovator



Michaela Loukas is an 18-year-old medical technology innovator whose award-winning, peer-reviewed research is helping shape a future where AI can save lives. Michaela uses her platform to advocate for girls in STEM, young people from multicultural backgrounds, and educators adapting to AI.

Michaela migrated from Greece at five years old, learning English as her second language. At 15, she co-designed a robotic melanoma-screening prototype aimed at improving access to screening in rural communities. Then at 17, she built an AI model that achieved 96.5% accuracy distinguishing malignant from healthy breast tissue, while also classifying breast cancer subtypes and identifying emerging biomarkers being studied for their role in treatment response.

Michaela's interest in cancer grew from seeing its impact on her own family and learning that some genomic tests used to personalise treatment can cost thousands and require samples to be sent overseas. Her goal isn't just better technology, but technology that doesn't leave anyone behind based on where they live or what they can afford.

DANNY SCHOUTEN
Founder, Community Shark Bite Kits



Danny Schouten is the creator of Community Shark Bite Kits, bleeding-control stations that are now installed at hundreds of beaches across Australia.

When a friend survived a shark attack only because a bystander quickly fashioned a makeshift tourniquet from a dog lead, Danny saw the critical need for on-site emergency equipment.

Danny responded by designing Community Shark Bite Kits: specialised first-aid stations containing tourniquets, compression bandages, dressings, thermal blankets, amputated-part bags, gloves, a whistle and clear instructions for treating severe bleeding. When the majority of NSW beaches are unpatrolled and emergency services may experience delays reaching remote locations, Danny's kits will save lives.

Danny spends weekends assembling the kits, which have already proven their value, notably at a shark attack at Coogee Beach in June 2026. Community Shark Bite Kits have been installed at more than 330 beaches across Australia, and Danny's vision is for every beach in Australia to be equipped with a kit.

GRACE TOOMBS
Founder, June Health



A proud Euahlayi and Kooma woman, Grace Toombs is reshaping women's health with agency, dignity and prevention at its core.

Experiencing crippling pain from age 14, Grace was told by doctors that there was nothing wrong, before finally being diagnosed at 21 with stage three endometriosis. During surgery, a cervical screen revealed high-grade precancerous cells, years before the recommended screening age.

Learning that endometriosis has an average diagnostic delay of six to eight years, and seeing the many barriers women face to screening, Grace resolved to improve the experience.

Grace left medical school to study public health, becoming a fierce public health advocate while working across some of Australia's leading health research institutes. She then built June Health, which began as Australia's first at-home STI and cervical screening platform. Today June Health is building a world where no woman ever has to prove she is in pain, through evidence-based education, storytelling and events.

JILL ASHLEY AND PAUL IRELAND
Founders, ShoreTrack



Jill Ashley and Paul (Fatty) Ireland founded ShoreTrack in 2020 to support disengaged young people in the Nambucca Valley through hands-on learning, mentoring and trade-based training.

In just five years, ShoreTrack has assisted more than 750 young people and helped shift community perceptions – showing that disengaged youth are full of potential. So far, 86% of those who completed a Certificate II pathway through ShoreTrack remain employed.

Jill and Fatty volunteer their time and resources to provide mentoring, meals, transport, trade-based training and employment pathways. Working with businesses, community, and government agencies, they have built support networks to help marginalised young people attain independence.

They've marked a significant achievement in a regional community where barriers – such as lack of transport and low expectations – can impede opportunity.

BRENDAN CULLEN
Mental health advocate



Brendan Cullen talks to farmers, footy clubs, schools and community groups across Australia about mental health, resilience and why asking for help is the strongest thing a person can do.

To get through long days working on drought-afflicted sheep stations around Broken Hill, Brendan used to drink alcohol to cope. In 2015, he realised something wasn't right and found the courage to walk into the local hospital and ask for help.

Treatment enabled Brendan to pivot his life for the better. Inspired by his brother, he joined the local Broken Hill swim club – a 60 km drive away. His next challenge was to swim the English Channel.

Today, Brendan serves as ambassador for Lifeline Regional SA & Far West NSW and is a Champion with We've Got Your Back, the Royal Flying Doctor Service's peer-support program. Brendan helps people in remote communities to spot the symptoms of depression and to check in on their mates before things reach crisis point.

SAMANTHA LONGMORE
Disability advocate



Samantha (Sam) Longmore's life changed overnight when, at the age of 20, she sustained a spinal cord injury from two back-to-back car accidents that resulted in paralysis down her right side. Sam has used her story to help others see what's possible by speaking at schools, businesses and community groups about resilience, rural life, mental health and road safety.

Sam founded and runs multiple businesses across agriculture and events, and competes at a world level in disabled water skiing. Sam's leadership is shaped not by theory but by lived experience: adaptability when plans collapse, resilience when circumstances harden, and the determination to do difficult things.

In 2026, Sam wheeled 441 km across regional NSW – from Corowa to Yass – in eight days, raising $203,165 for rural mental health. She completed the journey despite relentless rain, rough roads, strong winds and a broken leg.

Sam encourages people to think differently about challenges, change, and their own capabilities.

SOPHIE WILKSCH
Founder, Shedding Community Workshop Inc



In 2018, Sophie Wilksch imagined a community workshop like a men's shed, but for everyone, where participants could shed their fears and build with curiosity. So far, Sophie has inspired thousands of participants and volunteers.

On a 36m² verandah in Mullumbimby, Sophie created a place where people of all ages could learn building and carpentry in an environment grounded in inclusivity, wellbeing and hands-on discovery. By using reclaimed and recycled materials, Sophie provides an inventive education in sustainability. Shedding's philosophy came into full force during the 2022 Northern Rivers floods, when thousands of damaged items poured into the small verandah workshop. Alongside practical repairs, Shedding provided crucial emotional support to traumatised residents, cementing the organisation's role as an important community service.

Sophie's efforts led Transport for NSW to offer Mullumbimby's disused railway shed, enabling Shedding to meet the growing community need. Sophie now aims to bring Shedding's workshops to regional communities nationwide.

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 all across the country and from all fields of endeavour. This is just a snapshot of the recipients from New South Wales for the past five years. The full honour roll can be viewed at **australianoftheyear.org.au**

Australian of the Year

2026	Dr Alison Thompson OAM – Global humanitarian
2025	Kath Koschel – Founder, Kindness Factory
2024	Professor Georgina Long AO and Professor Richard Scolyer AO – In Memoriam – Melanoma treatment pioneers
2023	Craig Foster AM – Human rights and anti-racism activist, former Socceroo
2022	Professor Veena Sahajwalla – Founding Director of the Centre for Sustainable Materials Research and Technology at the University of New South Wales

Senior Australian of the Year

2026	Professor Henry Brodaty AO – Dementia treatment pioneer
2025	Dr Karl Kruszelnicki AM – Science enthusiast and educator
2024	John Ward – Geriatrician and co-founder, Hunter Ageing Alliance
2023	Teresa Plane – Palliative care pioneer and advocate
2022	Abla Tohamy Kadous – President of the Islamic Women's Welfare Association

Young Australian of the Year

2026	Nedd Brockmann – Ultramarathon runner for homelessness
2025	Maddison O'Gradey-Lee – Mental health advocate and researcher
2024	Nikhil Autar – In Memoriam – Researcher and founder, Bheem Health
2023	Lottie Dalziel – Founder, Banish and sustainability champion
2022	Dr Daniel Nour – Founder of Street Side Medics

Australia's Local Hero

2026	Theresa Mitchell – Carer for the homeless
2025	Martha Jabour OAM – Co-founder, Homicide Victims Support Group
2024	Angus Olsen – Childhood cancer illustrator and author
2023	Amar Singh – Founder, Turbans 4 Australia
2022	Shanna Whan – Founder and CEO of Sober in the Country

* 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

MinterEllison

NADC | National Australia Day Council