

MEDIA RELEASE
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**2026 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS NOMINEES
FOR NORTHERN TERRITORY ANNOUNCED**

Nominees for the 2026 Australian of the Year Awards for the Northern Territory include Indigenous community leaders, a dementia nurse, volunteer first responders, a remote housing advocate and a police officer.

The nominees are:

2026 Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory

Adam Drake - Founder, Balanced Choice Program (Darwin)
Tanya Egerton - Founder, Remote OpShop Project (Darwin)
Dr Felix Ho ASM - Volunteer paramedic and youth program builder (Darwin)
Jonah Ryan - Indigenous land management leader and mentor (Maningrida)

2026 Senior Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory

Rosemary Copeland - Remote ophthalmology nurse (Darwin)
Jenny Duggan OAM - Environmental warrior (Katherine)
Malcolm Hales - Women's football coach and advocate (Barunga Community)

2026 Young Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory

Conor Bowden - Indigenous community leader (Darwin)
Jaiden Dickenson - Indigenous community leader (Tennant Creek)
Constable Jermaine Ostrofski - Police officer and community advocate (Alice Springs)
Lila Tonkin - Dementia nurse and advocate (Darwin)

2026 Local Hero for the Northern Territory

Ron Green BM ESM - Emergency services and St John Ambulance volunteer (Katherine)
Nicole Hayes - Central Australian community advocate (Alice Springs)
Norman Frank Jupurrula - Remote housing advocate (Tennant Creek/Jurnkurrakur)
Ramnik Walia - Senior and disability rights advocate (Darwin)

**see detailed bios on following pages*

The Northern Territory nominees are among 134 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The Northern Territory award recipients will be announced on Monday 3 November 2025 in a ceremony at Mindil Beach Casino Resort, which will also be available to watch online at australianoftheyear.org.au.

They will then join other state and territory recipients as finalists for the national awards announcement on 25 January 2026 in Canberra.

National Australia Day Council CEO Mark Fraser AO CVO said the Northern Territory nominees represented the extraordinary ways in which individuals make a real difference in our society.

"The nominees for the Northern Territory awards are all contributing to help people and communities," said Mark.

"Whether through improving life in remote communities, leading by example for young people or advocating for social change, the nominees are proud Territorians making a real impact."

ENDS.

Nominee bios on the following pages and can also be viewed from australianoftheyear.org.au.

Nominees have supplied **photos** which can be downloaded from this link: [NT NOMINEE PHOTOS \(supplied\)](#)

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2026 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY – NOMINEE BIOS

Adam Drake

Founder, Balanced Choice Program

Adam Drake founded the Balanced Choice Program, a values-driven initiative that combines theatre, fitness and personal development to inspire positive change.

Adam created the first Balanced Choice Program at a Darwin detention centre in 2014 to empower young people to feel strong on the outside while finding healing and hope on the inside. The program has since expanded nationwide to school groups, remote communities, government departments, corporates, and sporting organisations, while continuing to work with prisoners.

In Tennant Creek, 49-year-old Adam partners with a local community organisation through the Indigenous Skills and Employment Program to help people connect with their values and wellbeing before stepping into employment and works with educators nationwide to guide people towards values-led choices and purposeful futures.

He runs justice sector leadership programs and workshops and has collaborated with Father Greg Boyle and Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, the world's largest gang-intervention program, to deliver prison and corporate workshops.

Tanya Egerton

Founder, Remote OpShop Project

Tanya Egerton founded the Remote OpShop Project in 2016 as a social enterprise supporting self-reliance and economic self-determination in remote First Nations communities.

By establishing community-owned op shops, 48-year-old Tanya has made clothing and household goods affordable and accessible in some of Australia's most remote areas.

The op shops create opportunities for business skill development and employment, particularly for women, and enable communities to generate revenue for community-identified cultural projects. This fosters both economic empowerment and cultural resilience.

Tanya calls on retailers and everyday Australians to contribute excess stock and quality second-hand items, diverting clothing and household goods from landfill and advancing the circular economy. These contributions supply more than 45 Remote OpShops across some of Australia's most isolated communities.

In 2024, the project opened its first Reuse Hub in Darwin, a model Tanya is expanding into a network of reuse and recycling hubs across Northern Australia, furthering equity and sustainability.

Dr Felix Ho ASM

Volunteer paramedic and youth program builder

Dr Felix Ho tirelessly serves remote communities in the Northern Territory as a medical practitioner. But for Felix, that's not enough – he also volunteers thousands of his hours building the St John Youth Program and helps at public events as a St John first responder.

Since joining as a St John cadet in 1995 at the age of 13, Felix has faithfully served others, including overseas as an Intensive Care Paramedic on a United Nations mission to Timor-Leste.

In 2020, he took on national leadership of the youth portfolio for St John Ambulance Australia, where he's a guiding force for over 3,000 young people, equipping the next generation of first responders. Aligned with clinical standards, Felix developed interactive, accessible and engaging training for youth and cadets across Australia.

Now 43, Felix brings people together across geography and generations, to equip Australia's youth to save lives through first aid in an emergency.

Jonah Ryan

Indigenous land management leader and mentor

Jonah Ryan is a proud Bininj man from Maningrida in Western Arnhem Land. As the first ranger dedicated to the Northern Land Council's Learning on Country program, Jonah guides students towards purposeful, achievable futures in their transition from school into accredited training and employment.

Jonah helps students understand what is possible through hands-on conservation projects, marine operations and traditional ecological knowledge rooted in culture. To broaden the impact of his leadership, Jonah was appointed to the Maningrida Learning on Country Steering Committee to help guide the strategic direction and governance of the program across 14 remote communities in Northern Australia.

Speaking multiple Indigenous languages including Burrarra, Kune, Kriole and Djinang as well as English, 35-year-old

Jonah is widely respected for his ability to connect with students, educators, elders and rangers alike.

Jonah's transformational influence and passion is helping to improve local school attendance, increasing engagement in vocational training and growing the presence of Indigenous youth in environmental careers.

2026 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY – NOMINEE BIOS

Rosemary Copeland

Remote ophthalmology nurse

Rosemary Copeland helped establish the Ophthalmology Outreach Program across the Top End, ensuring that everyone can access eye care.

Over the past 12 years, Rosemary has travelled in small planes from Darwin to remote communities for three weeks of every month to deliver life-changing eye care treatments to thousands of patients. She's had patients arriving at her clinics by boat during floods, and she's used dinghies to reach patients separated by water. She's persevered through perilous wet season flying conditions and the occasional snake in her room.

Rosemary and her team restore sight to hundreds of people each year. In 2023 this included 1,059 episodes of care, 96 cataract and pterygium surgeries and 158 minor procedures, such as laser and intravitreal injections.

Now 71, Rosemary is a role model for the ophthalmology trainees, orthoptists and medical students she includes on her adventures – epitomising culturally safe eye care.

Jenny Duggan OAM

Environmental warrior

For decades, Jenny Duggan has shown extraordinary grassroots leadership as Katherine's 'rubbish warrior', quietly transforming the landscape and community spirit of her town.

Each morning 67-year-old Jenny walks the banks of the Katherine River to remove litter. In collecting hundreds of kilograms of rubbish, she's put the spotlight on environmental safety.

To reduce the danger of broken glass in public spaces, Jenny advocated for the Katherine Liquor Accord's move to plastic wine bottles. She's also a force behind Katherine's Neighbourhood Watch – all part of her drive to make Katherine safer for everyone.

Jenny supports community members experiencing hardship through her volunteer work with the St Vincent de Paul Society. Here Jenny serves on the management committee of Ormonde House, which provides housing for men in need, and on the management committee for Katherine's Vinnies store.

In her daily, humble, practical service, Jenny exemplifies community care in action.

Malcolm Hales

Women's football coach and advocate

School principal Malcolm Hales is helping talented female football players in Barunga overcome the tyranny of distance by driving players to representative matches, clinics and gala days.

For the players and their coach, it's a 900km round trip to Darwin and 200km round trip to Katherine every week to participate in Northern Territory Australian Football League games. Yet by opening the doors to these high-level matches, Malcolm has provided Arnhem Crows Football Club players with invaluable experiences beyond their community, helping them develop as athletes, leaders and positive role models.

In 2020, Arnhem Crows Football Club entered the Big Rivers Football League and became the first Indigenous community women's team to play in a senior women's AFL competition. Since then, they've won five premierships in six years, earning 60 women a premiership medallion – a personal achievement they can always remember with great pride.

By championing women's football, 69-year-old Malcolm is creating opportunities in and beyond football for Barunga's women.

2026 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY – NOMINEE BIOS

Conor Bowden

Indigenous community leader

Tagalaka and Gumatj man Conor Bowden is widely regarded as one of the most inspiring leaders of his generation.

A Darwin schoolteacher, Conor first gained national recognition during the Voice to Parliament referendum campaign. Alongside First Nations advocate, Jaiden McGregor, he created TikTok videos that used humour, cultural references and accessible language to explain complex constitutional ideas. Reaching over 1.1 million views, the videos became a trusted source of information, especially for young people.

Conor teaches and mentors students from remote communities at a boarding school in Darwin while continuing his work at the intersection of local action and national reform. In 2024, he contributed to the Youth Voice Northern Territory Theory of Change, a strategic initiative to improve youth engagement, and is part of several other community mentoring programs.

Conor, 29, is a powerful advocate for equity, truth and justice who never loses sight of who he represents.

Jaiden Dickenson

Indigenous community leader

Proud Warumungu man Jaiden Dickenson is a beacon of hope and resilience for young people in the Tennant Creek, Ali Curung and Elliott communities.

In his role as a Tennant Creek Mob Youth Diversion Officer, 18-year-old Jaiden helps young people address the trauma at the root of crime and social disorder by taking responsibility for their behaviour, overcoming their personal challenges and moving towards rehabilitation.

Jaiden's approach is grounded in empathy, cultural understanding and the belief that every young person needs someone to believe in them. His work has led to a significant reduction in the number of youth re-offending and supported engagement in more positive pathways.

In mentoring young people, Jaiden's influence has created a ripple effect, empowering other young people to also take up roles as mentors within the Tennant Creek Mob.

Constable Jermaine Ostrofski

Police officer and community advocate

Constable Jermaine Ostrofski is a proud Wulli man, a highly decorated police officer and an openly gay community advocate.

Since joining the Northern Territory Police in 2017, 28-year-old Jermaine has served remote communities such as Kintore and Gapuwiyak, building trust with elders, traditional owners and families. He has confronted isolation and occasional hostility with respect and integrity, earning him the Northern Territory Aboriginal Community Police Officer of the Year Award in 2020, for strengthening relationships between Indigenous communities and law enforcement.

Dedicated to public safety, Jermaine received the Northern Territory Police Medal of Valour in 2024 for displaying unwavering courage in arresting a violent offender who had taken the lives of four people and injured another. Jermaine is the State Coordinator, Northern Territory, at the LGBTQ Domestic Violence Awareness Foundation and a volunteer coach at Riding for the Disabled.

Jermaine's selflessness and unyielding determination to protect his community is making the Northern Territory safer.

Lila Tonkin

Dementia nurse and advocate

As a registered nurse and the youngest member of the leadership team at Dementia Support Australia, Lila Tonkin's mission is to ensure that everyone who lives with dementia can access the support they need to live a full and happy life.

For Lila, this includes people living in remote communities, where she pioneers the delivery of dementia services to communities yet to be reached by Dementia Support Australia. In this role, she prioritises culturally safe dementia support for First Nations people.

Passionate about raising dementia awareness and understanding within the community, Lila spearheads captivating educational initiatives for organisations such as Northern Territory Health and various aged care organisations. She also takes the time to mentor other staff who work at Dementia Support Australia.

Through innovation and creative service delivery models, 24-year-old Lila strives to improve the care provided to

people living with dementia, reducing stigma and improving quality of life.

2026 LOCAL HERO FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY – NOMINEE BIOS

Ron Green BM ESM

Emergency services and St John Ambulance volunteer

Local legend Ron Green has volunteered hundreds of hours keeping his community safe in times of crisis.

Since 2005, he's grown and strengthened the success of the Katherine Volunteer Unit of the Northern Territory Emergency Service. Ron, 50, also fights bushfires and attends vehicle crashes as a volunteer for the Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service. On top of this, he leads the Katherine Youth Division of St John Ambulance, where he inspires and trains future generations of emergency first responders.

Ron's exceptional bravery in an emergency extends wherever he's needed. In 2019, Ron fought bushfires across the southern states, and in 2025 he helped Queenslanders recover from Tropical Cyclone Alfred.

Ron's courage was demonstrated outside his home in 2016 when, despite significant personal danger, Ron and his pregnant wife Deslie intervened to protect a woman threatened by a knife-wielding man. At the time, Ron and Deslie's three children were sleeping inside.

Nicole Hayes

Central Australian community advocate

Nicole Hayes is a passionate advocate for the Australian pastoral industry and a nationally respected community leader who exemplifies resilience, generosity and humility.

When beef industry policy is discussed at a national level, 52-year-old Nicole ensures Central Australian pastoralists have their say. Nicole contributes expertise in encouraging leadership and fostering understanding of the importance of food production.

She also plays a pivotal role in advocating and fundraising for community health, including prostate cancer research and support for families impacted by organ donation.

Her influence even reached Bondi Beach, where Nicole helped organise the transport of cattle from her Undoolya station to Sydney for a symbolic mock droving event. This was in aid of the Herd of Hope Charity, which promotes organ donation awareness and supports regional Australian families affected by organ donation.

Nicole's work ethic and ability to bridge geographic and cultural divides is a testament to her vision and character.

Norman Frank Jupurrurla

Remote housing advocate

Norman Frank Jupurrurla is a Warumungu elder who co-founded Wilya Janta – an innovative Aboriginal not-for-profit cultural consultancy that promotes community agency in the design and construction of housing in Indigenous communities.

Norman lives with his family at Village Camp near Tennant Creek where during summer, temperatures regularly reach 40 degrees for weeks at a time, sometimes getting up to 49 degrees on the hottest days.

The hot and dry Central Australian deserts where many Indigenous Australians live are on the climate change front line, with locals at risk of heat-related health problems and deaths. Existing houses are often thermally inefficient, lack reliable power and are unsuitable for the local environment.

In co-founding Wilya Janta, 52-year-old Norman's mission is to provide culturally safe and climate appropriate housing. Wilya Janta puts the tenant at the centre of the housing design process with the core aim of building appropriate, affordable, scalable, thermally efficient, off-grid and climate resilient housing.

Ramnik Walia

Senior and disability rights advocate

As senior and disability rights advocate for the Darwin Community Legal Service, 39-year-old Ramnik Walia is dedicated to removing roadblocks for older Australians and people with disabilities so they can live active and dignified lives.

Growing up, Ramnik saw people discriminated against based on disability, class, caste and age. Witnessing this injustice drives him to ensure that those on the margins are heard.

In Maningrida, when residents with disabilities couldn't board planes safely, Ramnik's advocacy resulted in the installation of a passenger lift at one of Australia's most remote airports.

Then, when the Mandorah ferry terminal was designed with only steps, making it inaccessible to people with disabilities, Ramnik facilitated a community meeting with the Northern Territory Government. Through his advocacy alongside community members, the ferry terminal now provides access for people with disabilities and is compliant with national standards.

Ramnik blends compassion with action to drive tangible and lasting change in people's lives.