

Australian
of the Year
➤ Awards

Reflect. Respect. Celebrate.

**Australian
Capital Territory**

NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA

17 November 2025

20
26

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF MINISTER

Each year, the Australian of the Year Awards recognise outstanding Australians and their immense contributions to our communities.

These Awards allow us to celebrate the people in our community who continuously go above and beyond, demonstrating our great Australian spirit.

Today we will recognise 16 remarkable Canberrans. They have been selected from a talented and diverse group of nominees from across the Territory, and it is wonderful to be able to recognise their achievements.

From advocates and humanitarians to entrepreneurs and local leaders, our nominees are passionate changemakers who embody courage and inspire us to continue to do our best.

I would like to acknowledge our outgoing 2025 ACT Australians of the Year – Megan Gilmour, Marilyn and Peter Ralston OAM, Daniel Bartholomaeus, and Vanessa Brettell and Hannah Costello – and thank them for their contributions over the last 12 months.

I look forward to seeing the continued contributions of our nominees and recipients over the coming year, and the meaningful impact their work will have across our communities and beyond.

Andrew Barr MLA
ACT Chief Minister



20
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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



4
The National Australia Day Council Board selects the national recipients



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



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

For more information on Australia Day, our Ambassador Program, the free Aussie of the Month schools program, 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 Indigenous Australians



"My dream is to be able to hero people with a disability and be able to show what they can do, not what they can't do."

Daniel Bartholomaeus
2025 ACT Young Australian
of the Year

"We want new arrivals to Australia to be able to feel like they are part of Australian society and we think the best way to do that is through employment."

**Vanessa Brettell and
Hannah Costello**
2025 Local Heroes

"We have put telepresence robots into the classrooms of students who are in hospital or at home to enable them to connect into their classrooms in real time - we know this helps kids identify as kids - not as patients."

Megan Gilmour
2025 ACT Australian of the Year

"Achilles Running Club is giving our athletes an opportunity to move more confidently, and engage in their community."

**Marilyn Ralston and
Peter Ralston OAM**
2025 ACT Senior Australian
of the Year

LAUREN CANNELL

Advocate and humanitarian



Lauren Cannell is a changemaker dedicated to building inclusive and compassionate communities.

Lauren founded Educación Diversa, a not-for-profit community of international volunteers who design art-based programs that teach human rights, sexual and reproductive health and conflict resolution. She also founded ArtFullness, an organisation that harnesses creativity for healing, connection and mental health prevention.

Lauren serves on the board of Build Like a Girl and is a member of the Policy Advisory Committee for Women with Disabilities ACT. She initiated the Period Poverty, Period Dignity project to place free sanitary products in public toilets. Her grassroots effort contributed to the Australian Capital Territory becoming the first Australian jurisdiction to legislate the provision of free period products.

Living with a chronic heart condition, Lauren is dedicating her life to meaningful impact. She hopes to be remembered not for what she has, but for how she used her privilege to uplift others.

SARAH MCGORAM OAM

Cancer patient advocate



Sarah McGoram overcame the challenges of living with cancer to raise awareness about the difficulties faced by people living with rare cancers.

Diagnosed with gastrointestinal stromal tumours at a young age and given only months to live, she defied the prognosis to raise a family, sustain a 20-year teaching career, and is a powerful voice for others living with a rare cancer.

Sarah has supported and campaigned on behalf of cancer patients, including for Rare Cancers Australia (RCA), highlighting systemic inequities in access to treatment, support, and information. She successfully led efforts to secure access to a life-saving cancer therapy, extending many patients' lives over the past four years. Sarah also advocates and fundraises for multiple charities, including climbing Mount Kosciuszko in the RCA Kosi Challenge while undergoing treatment.

Sarah's resilience and courage highlight how one person can overcome adversity to make a genuine difference in advocating for change.

PROFESSOR ROSE MCGREADY

Migrant and refugee health expert



Professor Rose McGready has spent three decades providing health services to displaced people in the border region between Thailand and Myanmar.

Arriving as a young doctor, Rose discovered that refugees who had fled persecution in Myanmar had difficulty accessing medical assistance in Thailand. In response, Rose established training for local staff to focus on services for expectant mothers and in the critical period of childbirth. Over the past 31 years, she has built a network of locally run clinics and out-patient services which have saved thousands of lives.

Rose's research has also led to new treatments being developed to tackle maternal malaria. Her findings have been adopted by the World Health Organisation as the global standard for combatting the disease, helping to treat millions of women around the world.

Rose's commitment, compassion and clinical expertise provide life-saving aid to some of the most vulnerable communities in the world.

KAREN SCHLAGE

Maternity care advocate and volunteer



Karen Schlage's own experience of pregnancy loss was the catalyst for her to advocate for better support for grieving families experiencing perinatal loss.

Karen lost her only children, Charlie and Sophia, during the second trimester of each pregnancy. Through these experiences, she has become a passionate, empathetic and effective advocate for others facing pregnancy loss. Karen's presentation to an inquiry into maternity care led to important changes in the Australian Capital Territory health system including the opening of a dedicated early pregnancy loss unit at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children.

Karen's advocacy has significantly contributed to policy development in maternity care, locally and nationally. Based on Karen's Churchill Fellowship recommendations, an in-hospital perinatal bereavement companion program is being implemented.

Karen's understanding and empathy have driven essential and meaningful change in how the health system provides care and support across Australia to families facing such heartbreaking loss.

CALVIN BRUTON OAM

Basketball legend



Calvin Bruton is well-known to basketball fans around the country as a player and coach who has made an outstanding contribution to the development of the game in Australia.

Calvin founded the Bruton Basketball Foundation to help young people develop not just basketball skills but also the skills they need to succeed in life. The Basketball Lessons 4Life program mentors disadvantaged and at-risk high school students to help them build confidence, set goals and forge a better life.

Calvin draws on his own life experiences to show how sport can empower young people and open doors for opportunities in education and employment. Through the program, young people learn to set goals, work as a team and engage positively with peers and family.

Calvin has had a huge impact on Australian sporting culture and is now making as big a difference to the lives of young Australians.

MARION LÊ AM

Refugee advocate



Marion Lê has spent five decades advocating for the rights of migrants and refugees in Australia. Her work has had a profound effect on Australia's humanitarian response to refugee crises, starting with the arrival of Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s.

Marion has provided expert advice and guidance to thousands of migrants and refugees who come to her for help to navigate immigration requirements. Her professionalism in handling complex visa issues and citizenship matters has been instrumental in helping many families find sanctuary.

Marion is a powerful advocate for multicultural inclusion, working with several migrant communities to ensure equal opportunities for all. She is a stalwart champion of social equity, consistently arguing against punitive and discriminatory elements in Australian immigration policy and standing up for the rights of asylum seekers.

Marion's expertise, generosity and determination to help those seeking safety has helped countless people find a new life in Australia.

HEATHER REID AM

Football pioneer



Heather Reid has made it possible for thousands of women to play football, both in the Australian Capital Territory and around Australia.

Heather was instrumental in establishing the Australian National University Women's Soccer Club in 1978 and the Australian Capital Territory Women's Soccer Association a year later. As the first female CEO of Capital Football in 2004, she brought together four associations into a single peak body and secured Canberra United's inclusion in the national W-League, helping to promote the game to a wider audience.

Heather has continued to support and mentor players, coaches and administrators, both locally and internationally. She set up the Heather Reid AM Bursary to help pay the registration fees of players in need of assistance, ensuring that financial hardship is not a barrier to participation.

Heather's vision and dedication to inclusion and equality have opened pathways for thousands of women to take part in sport.

DR ADELE STEVENS

Palliative care advocate



Dr Adele Stevens has dedicated her life to ensuring better healthcare and consumer empowerment in health services. For over 10 years, she has advocated for improved palliative services for patients in palliative care and the right to choice about end of life.

After a long career in health services, Adele joined the Health Care Consumers Association in 2003 and was president from 2008 to 2012. She continues her volunteer work with the association as chair of the Health of Older People Consumer Reference Group, focusing on healthcare and opportunities for older people. Adele is an active member of the Council on the Ageing ACT as a member of its board and having previously advised on policy. Adele also co-chairs the ACT consumer reference group for end of life and palliative care.

Adele is a trusted and respected health consumer advocate with a strong commitment to improving access to palliative care.

LIAM ADAMS

Author and cartoonist



Liam Adams is challenging perceptions about autism and living with intellectual disability through his self-publishing business, Everyone Needs a Liam.

Liam has published eight books through Everyone Needs a Liam, combining science fiction, fantasy and comedy, illustrating each book cover with his own cartoons. Liam launched the business to show what people living with intellectual disabilities and autism could achieve, challenging preconceptions about neurodiversity and celebrating difference.

Liam has spoken at events, including the Adelaide Fringe Festival 2024, where he won a Week 4 Weekly Award for Emerging Artist.

Through his writing, speaking appearances and cartoons, Liam is a role model for other neurodivergent and disabled artists across Australia, showing what can be achieved with support and self-belief. The success of his business highlights the contribution that people living with intellectual disabilities and autism can make in the creative arts, helping to further a more inclusive society.

HOWARD MACLEAN

Housing advocate



Howard Maclean's campaign for housing policy reform has had a significant impact on how future housing developments will be planned and built in Canberra.

Howard is the founding convenor of Greater Canberra, a community-based advocacy organisation that campaigns for more affordable housing, liveable suburbs and environmentally sustainable planning. Under his guidance, Greater Canberra has become an important grassroots voice advocating for changes to the Australian Capital Territory's planning laws.

Howard played a leadership role in the Missing Middle Canberra campaign launched by Greater Canberra which argued for increasing medium density housing in suburbs to address housing shortages in a sustainable manner. He was a key figure in the campaign, working to mobilise support and build a community consensus.

Howard's advocacy, strategic thinking and expertise has helped transform attitudes to urban development and recognise the need for more sustainable housing, not just in Canberra but in metropolitan areas across Australia.

SITA SARGEANT

Historian and guide



Sita Sargeant is forging a distinctive approach to storytelling and historical research, highlighting little-known women's stories and their impact on towns and cities across Australia.

She is the founder of *She Shapes History*, a historical tourism company and social enterprise dedicated to uncovering the often-overlooked stories of women who have shaped Australia in ways that receive little or no recognition. Through walking tours, digital content, and partnerships with cultural institutions and historic sites, Sita reveals how women's contributions have long been ignored by mainstream history.

Having taken more than 10,000 people on tours, *She Shapes History* has expanded to Sydney and Melbourne with a team of dedicated guides. Sita has also published a book spotlighting the stories of more than 250 women who have shaped history in 31 towns and cities across Australia. Her passion, energy, and storytelling prowess are helping Australians see the full picture of their history, creating a richer, more inclusive understanding of the nation's identity.

ANJALI SHARMA

Climate change campaigner



Anjali Sharma started campaigning for climate action as a 14-year-old, organising school strikes in Melbourne to urge governments to address greenhouse gas emissions.

While still at school, she was the lead litigant in a landmark civil action case against the Australian Government, arguing that it had a duty of care to protect future generations when considering fossil fuel projects.

Now studying law at the Australian National University, Anjali is campaigning for a proposed amendment to the Climate Change Act, known as the Duty of Care Bill. This would make it a statutory requirement that any climate-related government decisions will take the health and wellbeing of future generations into consideration.

Anjali's leadership and determination highlight how young people have an important stake in challenging policy on climate change. Her grassroots action demonstrates how anybody can be a voice for change, regardless of age.

BEN ALEXANDER

Mental health advocate



Ben Alexander is well known in Canberra for his rugby career with the Brumbies and Wallabies.

Since retiring, he has turned his focus to mental health, co-founding Running for Resilience (R4R) with Matt Breen to help make Canberra suicide-free by 2033.

R4R helps people overcome personal struggles by exercising and connecting with others. Every week, hundreds join free runs and walks across Canberra to boost their physical and mental health.

Through podcasts, newsletters and community events, Ben shares practical ways to connect, manage energy and support others. Open about his own challenges after rugby, Ben now uses that experience to help others find connection, purpose and hope. His work is building a stronger, more supportive community where no one feels they have to face tough times alone.

BRADLEY BUTT

Men's health advocate



Bradley Butt is dedicated to making it easier for men to take an active interest in their urological health.

The Canberra-based pharmacist acknowledges that it's a topic men may find awkward or embarrassing to discuss, so he's breaking down barriers and starting conversations. Bradley founded Men's Health Downunder, a specialised service that provides advice and treatment to men about their urological conditions in a supportive environment.

Starting in Canberra, the service now extends to a network of pharmacists around the country who recommend treatment solutions and give guidance on how to implement them. Bradley has also taken Men's Health Downunder on the road, travelling around Australia to visit pharmacists and hold consultations to give remote communities access to the same treatments.

Bradley is committed to the role that local pharmacists play in the community, providing health advice and treatment options via one-on-one conversations with customers.

MICHAEL PHELAN

Youth mentor



A proud Barunggam and Gunggari man, Michael Phelan grounds his work in culture, connection and community. His cultural values guide the way he mentors and supports young people.

Through the Reconnect mentoring program he established and runs at the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, Michael is making a lasting difference to young people's lives. The program imparts valuable vocational and life skills that build confidence, self-belief and pride in work.

During the program, Michael teaches barista and hospitality skills, but the true strength of his work lies in helping each participant recognise their own value and potential. The benefits often continue well beyond the program, with many participants securing long-term employment after returning to their communities.

Michael is deeply committed to breaking the cycle of reoffending by showing young people a different path to walk. He delivers his program with empathy, cultural awareness and trauma-informed practice to ensure each participant feels respected, supported and seen.

RAFFY SGROI

Inclusive employment champion



Raffy Sgroi is committed to boosting inclusivity in what has traditionally been a predominantly male environment – automotive workshops.

Raffy and her husband Charlie run Canberra's Car Mechanical Services auto workshop where they create training and employment opportunities for women, people living with neurodivergence and disabilities, and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Raffy's self-funded 12-week My Career Portfolio program teaches young people the skills they need to transition to the workforce. Since the program started three years ago, Raffy has mentored 186 students and is focused on giving opportunities to those who may fall through the cracks.

Raffy has long championed inclusive employment and sustainability in automotive services, putting into practice her belief that inclusion and diversity help to build stronger communities. Raffy loves seeing people succeed. She is a regular participant in school career expos, encouraging young people to explore opportunities for growth and skills development in the automotive trades.

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 2026 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 2026 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 all 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

	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
	2021	Professor Brendan Murphy AC – Former Chief Medical Officer
	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
	2021	Patricia Anderson AO – Writer and advocate for Australia's First Peoples
	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
	2021	Tara McClelland – Advocate for the rights of young people
	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
	2021	Timothy Miller – Founder of Lids4Kids

* 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



