

MEDIA RELEASE

WEDNESDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2025

2026 AUSTRALIANS OF THE YEAR FOR QUEENSLAND ANNOUNCED

2026 Australian of the Year for Queensland - Dr Rolf Gomes (Kenmore Hills)
2026 Senior Australian of the Year for Queensland - Cheryl Harris OAM (Sunshine Coast)
2026 Young Australian of the Year for Queensland - Jarib Branfield-Bradshaw (Cunnamulla)
2026 Local Hero for Queensland - Ian Gay (Parkwood, Gold Coast)

Awards event livestreamed via australianoftheyear.org.au

The 2026 Australian of the Year Award recipients for Queensland have been announced at a ceremony in Brisbane this evening.

The Queensland recipients will join those from the other states and territories for the national awards to be announced on 25 January 2026.

The 2026 Australian of the Year for Queensland is mobile health pioneer Dr Rolf Gomes.

When Dr Rolf Gomes, 52, was confronted with how differently cardiac patients were treated in rural and remote Australia, he decided to do something about it. He designed and launched the first Heart of Australia mobile 'Heart Trucks' to visit remote communities.

Today the Heart Trucks bring regular specialist clinics to over 30 towns in rural Australia, providing early diagnostic services that would otherwise be out of reach. Since 2014, the trucks have treated more than 20,000 patients and saved countless lives. The truck fleet will expand to 11 trucks by 2027 to provide services nationally, adding new diagnostic services for a wide range of early intervention health screenings, including for lung cancer.

Rolf's vision, ingenuity and tenacity have had a far-reaching impact on rural health and medicine in Australia, helping to save lives and ensure that rural patients have access to clinical services without having to travel long distances.

Champion for volunteers Cheryl Harris OAM is the 2026 Senior Australian of the Year for Queensland.

Cheryl Harris has been instrumental in driving volunteer engagement and championing the important work that volunteers perform on the Sunshine Coast.

Cheryl's passion for helping community began when she was just 20 years old. Her advocacy and strong relationships throughout the Sunshine Coast community has seen volunteering in the region increase significantly. Today, thousands of volunteers actively support the Sunshine Coast community in various roles from charity work to disaster relief. As former CEO at Volunteering Sunshine Coast, Cheryl and her team collaborated with her community networks to initiate the innovative Pathways to Employment program, which helps people seeking paid employment to update their skills and build self-esteem through volunteering.

Cheryl, 75, is the current chair/president of Healthy Ageing Partnerships, which aims to empower older Australians to make informed decisions about their health through knowledge sharing.

Cheryl's contribution to community service highlights her selfless dedication to helping others in a manner that is always compassionate, informed and caring.

The 2026 Young Australian of the Year for Queensland is youth worker and mentor Jarib Branfield-Bradshaw.

Jarib Branfield-Bradshaw, a proud Kooma man and youth worker, has made a huge difference to the town of Cunnamulla by opening a youth neighbourhood centre. As a local himself, Jarib knows what it's like to live in a quiet town where there's not a lot for young people to do outside the home.

At the heart of Jarib's project is showing young people in places like Cunnamulla, that their stories matter. Since Jarib founded the centre two years ago, almost every young person in town has come through its doors seeking support, food and connection. Jarib, 21, draws on his own lived experience to ensure they feel safe and seen and he has personally case managed 200 young people. It is a place where they can be themselves and receive the support they need to manage complex and traumatic situations in their lives.

Jarib's ability to listen, guide and offer hope is making a genuine difference to young people in Cunnamulla.

Disabled surfing volunteer Ian Gay is the 2026 Local Hero for Queensland.

Ian Gay has dedicated more than 20 years to helping people with disabilities enjoy the surf in a fun, safe way. As a volunteer with the Disabled Surfers Association Gold Coast (DSAGC), Ian has held many roles and was branch vice president until 2015 and then branch president from 2015 to present.

The DSAGC now runs six summer events at Flat Rock Beach, Currumbin, supported by a large volunteer group from all walks of life. Under Ian's astute and compassionate leadership, the sophistication and safety of DSAGC events have continually improved, enhancing the quality and reach of the experience for all involved. The DSAGC events have a profound impact on participants and volunteers alike, helping to foster greater community spirit and inclusivity.

Since 2021, 56-year-old Ian has also held the role of national president of the Disabled Surfers Association of Australia, lending his expertise and leadership to disabled surfing branches around the country.

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

"Rolf saw a gap in critical medical services and decided to fix it; Cheryl's selfless contributions are a shining example of the value of volunteering; Jarib is a source of support and understanding for young people just like him; and Ian is sharing the simple joy of the surf with profound results," said Mark.

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

ENDS.

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

PHOTOS: From the awards announcement event can be downloaded from this link (credit NADC/Salty Dingo): [QLD Media Distribution photos - High res](#)