

MEDIA RELEASE

THURSDAY 13 NOVEMBER 2025

**2026 AUSTRALIANS OF THE YEAR
FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA ANNOUNCED**

2026 Australian of the Year for Western Australia - Dr Daniela Vecchio (Parklands)

2026 Senior Australian of the Year for Western Australia - Professor Kingsley Dixon AO (Waroona)

2026 Young Australians of the Year for Western Australia - Dr Haseeb Riaz and Gareth Shanthikumar (Peppermint Grove & City Beach)

2026 Local Hero for Western Australia - Frank Mitchell (Coolbellup)

Awards event livestreamed via australianoftheyear.org.au

The 2026 Australian of the Year Award recipients for Western Australia have been announced at a ceremony in Perth this evening.

The Western Australia 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 Western Australia is digital addiction and gaming disorder specialist Dr Daniela Vecchio.

Dr Daniela Vecchio is head of mental health and addiction services at Fiona Stanley Hospital. She is the pioneer in establishing the first publicly funded gaming disorder clinic in Australia in 2022.

She has seen increasing numbers of young people with addiction to video games and social media and was quick to recognise the distress and harms caused to them and their families. The clinic is unique worldwide, in providing early detection and intervention in an acute hospital setting.

Daniela, 57, has driven the development of holistic assessments and a wide range of personalised treatments for her clients. She has fostered extensive collaborations, including internationally with Korea, Germany and Dubai, nationally with experts in the field, and locally with health, education and police services.

As a director of the Australian Gaming and Screens Alliance, she is promoting education and research into harmful online use and influencing national policy.

World-leading botanist Professor Kingsley Dixon AO is the 2026 Senior Australian of the Year for Western Australia.

Professor Kingsley Dixon from The University of Western Australia is an internationally recognised botanist whose devotion to science has transformed Australian native plant conservation.

As Foundation Director of Science at Perth's Kings Park and Botanic Garden, Kingsley shaped a small research unit into one of the world's top five botanic garden-based science centres. One of Kingsley's most notable achievements is the 1992 discovery of smoke as a cause for Australian plants to germinate after bushfires.

Kingsley actively educates schools and communities across Western Australia with his engaging 'Attenborough' style. He also works closely with Indigenous people in Broome and the Western Desert to establish native seed programs. Kingsley has spearheaded Western Australia's status as an international hub for mining environmental science, where he leads projects to lift mine rehabilitation standards and community conservation practices.

Kingsley, 71, bridges research and action, advocating both scientific inquiry and environmental stewardship with a commitment to a nature positive world.

The 2026 Young Australians of the Year for Western Australia are positive masculinity educators Dr Haseeb Riaz and Gareth Shanthikumar.

Dr Haseeb Riaz (25) and Gareth Shanthikumar (27) had their fair share of challenges growing up including struggling with negative emotions and transitioning from high school to adult life.

Haseeb and Gareth felt that negative stereotypes of masculinity were harming young men, so they established MAN UP to help young men strengthen their mental health, communicate openly and build pathways to healthier lives. Through workshops on male culture, respectful relationships and emotional coping, they provide boys with safe, relatable spaces to explore identity, relationships and emotional literacy.

At MAN UP, Haseeb and Gareth address the root causes of poor mental health and gender-based violence, equipping boys with tools for self-awareness and empathy before harmful behaviours take root. Both founders continue to volunteer their time to MAN UP alongside their professional careers.

Together, they've reached thousands of students and have built partnerships with educators, community leaders and mental health advocates across Australia.

Indigenous construction leader Frank Mitchell is the 2026 Local Hero for Western Australia.

Frank Mitchell, who turned 43 today, is a proud Whadjuk-Yued Noongar man, co-director of Wilco Electrical and co-founder/director of Kardan, Baldja and Bilyaa in the trades and construction industry.

Frank's commitment to change was shaped by early lived experiences of suicide and the loss of best friends. As a young single father, being offered an electrical apprenticeship felt like a profound opportunity. When he became a business owner in 2015, he pledged to create the same opportunities for Mob.

Starting with just eight staff and \$1.5 million turnover, Frank and his partners have created over 70 Aboriginal upskilling positions in the electrical and construction industry, including 30 electrical apprenticeships and awarding over \$11 million to Aboriginal subcontractors.

Today, all four companies collectively employ over 200 full-time staff. His story embodies a vision that integrates cultural values with business leadership, strengthening his ties to community while reshaping the construction industry and creating lasting impact and social justice.

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

"Daniela is at the leading edge of treating the quickly growing problem of digital addiction; Kingsley has made fundamental discoveries and continues to lead conservation practices; Haseeb and Gareth are positively impacting a generation of young men's values and sense of self; and Frank is paying opportunities forward to create generational change," 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): [WA Media Distribution photos - High res](#)