

MEDIA RELEASE
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2027 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS: SOUTH AUSTRALIA NOMINEES ANNOUNCED

People making an impact across volunteering, health, community contribution, technology, advocacy and environment are among the South Australia nominees announced today for the 2027 Australian of the Year Awards.

Sixteen people from across the state have been named as nominees for the 2027 Australian of the Year Awards for South Australia, with nominees recognised in each of the Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year and Australia's Local Hero categories.

Among this year's nominees are a citizen scientist recording the impact of the toxic algal bloom and bird flu, an educator putting Aboriginal knowledge at the centre of learning, a father changing attitudes to violence, a filmmaker sharing culture and history, and an orthopaedic surgeon who hiked from Mexico to Canada to raise funds for disadvantaged children.

The nominees are:

2027 Australian of the Year for South Australia

Dr Fariba Behnia-Willison - Endo-gynaecologist and reconstructive surgeon (Somerton Park)
Dr Muhammad Akbar Hussain - Space technology innovator and entrepreneur (Craigmore)
Dr Matthew Hutchinson - Orthopaedic surgeon and education fundraiser (St Peters)
Dr Susan Neuhaus AM CSC - Surgeon and author (Unley)

2027 Senior Australian of the Year for South Australia

Dr Susan Belperio - Citizen scientist (Toorak Gardens)
Keith Clark - Lifeline and fire service volunteer (Aldgate)
Dr Roger Hunt - Palliative medicine specialist (North Adelaide)
Dr Anne Jensen - Wetland ecologist (Adelaide)

2027 Young Australian of the Year for South Australia

Ishaan Chaudhuri - Health leader (St Peters)
Abbey Hardie - Sexual violence prevention advocate (Tea Tree Gully)
Jemima Leydon - Cancer ambassador (Rose Park)
Edward Robinson - Space educator and entrepreneur (Blair Athol)

2027 Australia's Local Hero for South Australia

Jordan Box - Community engagement champion (Athelstone)
Neil Davis - Violence prevention advocate (Woodcroft)
Fahim Hashimy - Media changemaker (Plympton Park)
Andrew Plastow - Education leader (Glenelg North)

**Detailed nominee biographies follow.*

The South Australia nominees are among 130 people being recognised across all states and territories in the 2027 Australian of the Year Awards.

National Australia Day Council CEO Carrie Leeson said the nominees for South Australia's achievements, dedication and contributions were inspiring.

"These nominees embody the values we admire and aspire to uphold – resilience, commitment, courage, kindness, and a genuine spirit of service to others," said Ms Leeson.

The 2027 South Australia award recipients will be announced Thursday 5 November in Adelaide. The ceremony will also be available to watch via livestream at australianoftheyear.org.au

The South Australia award recipients will then join recipients from the other states and territories as finalists for the national Australian of the Year Awards, announced in Canberra on 25 January 2027.

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Detailed nominee **biographies** follow and are also available at australianoftheyear.org.au.

Photos for download: Photos provided by the nominees for editorial use can be downloaded from here: [SA Nominee Photos - supplied by nominees](#) *(please use photo credits where noted on file names)*

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2027 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Dr Fariba Behnia-Willison

Endo-gynaecologist and reconstructive surgeon

As a gynaecologist, innovator and advocate for women's health, Dr Fariba Behnia-Willison is transforming the lives of tens of thousands of women through pioneering pelvic floor medicine, surgical innovation and compassionate care. An Iranian-Australian migrant, her journey across Iran, Germany and Australia shaped her resilience, precision and commitment to innovation. She believes every woman deserves dignity, comfort and advanced healthcare.

Through SmartFem's TGA-approved Victoria Graft System, 60-year-old Fariba advances regenerative solutions using a woman's own blood to create a graft for pelvic floor reconstruction, offering an alternative to synthetic mesh.

Through Desert Flower South Australia, she supports female genital mutilation survivors, providing restorative surgery using her graft at no cost.

Her mission extends beyond medicine by challenging silence, empowering women and building a legacy where innovation serves humanity. Her journey demonstrates how courage, compassion and knowledge can transform lives, restore dignity and ensure every woman's health and voice matters, while inspiring positive change across generations together.

Dr Muhammad Akbar Hussain

Space technology innovator and entrepreneur

Dr Muhammad Akbar Hussain, 47, is a general medical practitioner and astronomer whose career spans paediatrics, engineering, scientific research, entrepreneurship and public education.

After moving to Adelaide in 2016, Akbar built Australia's first mobile astronomical observatory for remote astronomy outreach and identified its application in space situational awareness. This led him to establish the Southern Cross Outback Observatories Project, an independent, self-funded international collaboration aiming to create a national debris tracking network and AI ready data systems.

A pioneer in extreme environmental technologies, Akbar holds multiple U.S. patents for Mars habitat design, hybrid power generation and space debris mitigation, contributing to Australia's presence in space science. Akbar's observatory initiatives, including projects overseas, have inspired Australian students to pursue STEM careers.

Akbar applies a human-centred philosophy to all his work. He is developing technologies that enhance safety in both future space missions and real-world environments, while encouraging the next generation of innovators.

Dr Matthew Hutchinson

Orthopaedic surgeon and education fundraiser

Dr Matthew Hutchinson is a leading orthopaedic surgeon and child protection advocate. Raised and homeschooled in the country, his life changed when he received an educational scholarship.

Overcoming significant childhood challenges, he channelled personal adversity into a decades-long campaign for child safety. Working closely with politicians, community leaders and media outlets, his dedicated lobbying directly triggered landmark legislative changes in South Australia in 2018. His powerful story also attracted international attention, including public support from rock legend Jon Bon Jovi.

A passionate believer in grass-roots action, 47-year-old Matthew has spoken at over 100 country schools and established Indigenous youth partnership programs.

In 2025, he raised over \$250,000 to fund scholarships for disadvantaged children by hiking from Mexico to Canada. Carrying everything he needed to survive on his back, he spent six months trudging 4,265 km across deserts, mountains and rivers.

Now aiming to raise \$1 million, he is committed to giving other disadvantaged children the same opportunities he had.

Dr Susan Neuhaus AM CSC

Surgeon and author

Dr Susan Neuhaus embodies a life of service as a specialist surgeon, former Australian Army officer, governance leader and author.

For more than three decades, Susan has served patients and communities, including in Cambodia, Bougainville and Afghanistan. In Tarin Kowt in 2009, she was the deployed surgeon when a suicide bomber struck the local police barracks. With one operating team available, she triaged and treated the wounded through what she describes as her “longest day”.

Her experiences in uniform shaped a lifelong commitment to honouring those who serve. That commitment extends through governance leadership across health, defence, veterans and not-for-profit sectors. As an author, 60-year-old Susan brings forgotten stories of Australian women in war to wider audiences through fiction and non-fiction.

As a member of the Council of the Australian War Memorial and Chair of its Development Committee, she has helped steward the Memorial through its most significant expansion, ensuring these stories are preserved and shared.

2027 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS**Dr Susan Belperio**

Citizen scientist

When an unprecedented toxic algal bloom hit South Australia in 2025, retired anaesthetist Dr Susan Belperio began recording the devastation, and making others aware of its catastrophic impacts.

Every day, 70-year-old Susan patrols Glenelg beaches and photographs dead and dying fish and seabirds, also focusing on invertebrates. She identifies each species and uploads her records to the iNaturalist Marine Mortalities project to document the damage.

So far, she’s logged over 22,000 observations and 404 species – an extraordinary record of her dedication. She raises the alarm when something changes, including a mass crab mortality event in 2026, so that scientists can respond quickly.

More recently, she’s been one of the leading community advocates for awareness of the H5N1 bird flu. Through her photography, conversations with community members and tireless dedication, Susan has become one of South Australia’s clearest voices on environmental harm to our coast and its wildlife.

Keith Clark

Lifeline and fire service volunteer

Keith Clark's exemplary commitment to helping others began in the late 1980s after witnessing the devastation of the Ash Wednesday bushfires.

Inspired by the volunteers who risked their lives to save others, Keith joined the Aldgate Country Fire Service and has served for more than 30 years, becoming Captain and Brigade President.

The death of a fellow fire service volunteer by suicide prompted Keith to become a Lifeline crisis supporter. For over a decade, he has provided calm, compassionate, non-judgmental support to thousands of Australians in their most vulnerable moments, saving lives and strengthening families and communities. As a Lifeline student mentor, he guides new crisis supporters with empathy and reassurance.

Keith has also volunteered as a Foodbank driver, taught English to refugees, currently coaches an Under 8s soccer team and coordinates two Walking Football groups, one for over 55s and the other for those living with a disability. Keith, 75, works tirelessly to strengthen the safety and wellbeing of his community.

Dr Roger Hunt

Palliative medicine specialist

Dr Roger Hunt has devoted more than 40 years to easing the suffering of people at the end of their lives. As a young doctor at South Australia's first publicly funded hospice, Roger found himself walking beside patients and families through the tender and deeply human experience of dying and recognised his calling.

A founding member of Daw House Hospice, Roger developed university courses that were among the first to be online, and he earned a research doctorate. He later served as Medical Head of the Western Adelaide Palliative Care Service and Central Adelaide Palliative Services. While Chairperson of SA's Palliative Care Association, he helped establish Palliative Care Australia.

Roger was a key advisor for South Australia's Consent to Medical Treatment and Palliative Care Act, protecting patient autonomy and clinicians' ability to relieve suffering.

Roger, 69, has long advocated for voluntary assisted dying to give patients more agency and control, he has served on ministerial panels and now sits on the SA Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board.

Dr Anne Jensen

Wetland ecologist

Dr Anne Jensen has dedicated her life to protecting Australia's rivers, wetlands and freshwater ecosystems. Anne has helped generations understand the beauty, complexity and importance of healthy rivers through clear communication, photographs and storytelling, such as in her book *Murray-Darling Mysteries*. She has combined her scientific expertise with practical action to rehabilitate wetlands and engage with local communities.

In 1996, she coordinated the Wetlands Atlas of the South Australian Murray Valley, describing 250 wetlands and creating a foundation for their sustainable management. As chief policy officer for wetlands and the Murray-Darling Basin, Anne's leadership strengthened South Australia's capacity to safeguard its freshwater resources ahead of major challenges including the Millennium Drought and climate change.

Anne's work has transformed public perceptions of wetlands from wastelands to vital ecosystems central to biodiversity and community wellbeing.

A gifted scientist and communicator, 74-year-old Anne has motivated countless Australians to value and protect our precious wetlands and rivers.

Ishaan Chaudhuri

Health leader

Ishaan Chaudhuri graduated high school soon after turning 16 and is now two years into his journey to becoming a doctor. Outside of his study, he gives back to the South Australian community in every way he can.

Concerned about equitable healthcare access, Ishaan independently designed and conducted a large-scale survey of more than 250 First Nations participants and key stakeholders. His work spotlighted the systemic challenges remote communities face in accessing healthcare and provided a platform for voices that are often overlooked.

Ishaan also established a tutoring initiative that has delivered more than \$5,000 worth of free lessons in mathematics, science and English to students experiencing financial hardship.

He serves on the executive for the Australian Medical Students' Association, ClimateShield, and the Central Youth Advocacy Network. Ishaan also chairs Doctors for the Environment Australia in South Australia and holds leadership positions in the Indian Bengali Cultural Association of Adelaide.

In stepping up to lead and serve, 18-year-old Ishaan isn't waiting until tomorrow to address the problems our community faces today.

Abbey Hardie

Sexual violence prevention advocate

Abbey Hardie established the South Australian team of What Were You Wearing, a sexual violence charity that offers a lifeline to survivors, and advocates for violence prevention. Abbey volunteers 20 hours each week alongside study and work to advocate against domestic, family and sexual violence.

A sexual violence survivor herself, 23-year-old Abbey has channelled her trauma into leading calls for Australia to not blame victims and start holding perpetrators accountable.

Abbey engages policymakers to push for survivor-centred healing supports. Through community mobilisation, petitioning and meetings with the Deputy Premier, Abbey worked to overturn a convicted rapist's visa – preventing his participation in the Adelaide Volleyball Championships.

Abbey has secured sexual assault education and bystander intervention for local bar staff and is campaigning for domestic, family and sexual violence education in schools. She also runs free survivor healing groups each month. Abbey's ability to translate advocacy into policy change is creating safer communities across South Australia.

Jemima Leydon

Cancer ambassador

Jemima Leydon was diagnosed with ovarian cancer at just five years old, undergoing emergency surgery, chemotherapy and months of hospital care.

As a teenager, Jemima learned that ovarian cancer has only a 49% survival rate and committed her time, skills and voice to improving outcomes for others. Over the past decade, she has become a powerful advocate for ovarian cancer awareness.

Since 2016, she has raised more than \$170,000 for medical research and contributed meaningfully to the Ovarian Council Research Foundation's (OCRF) Lived Experience Advisory Panel, ensuring patient perspectives shape grant-making. Named by the OCRF as an Advocacy Trailblazer in 2025, Jemima also serves as a community ambassador for the OCRF and as a junior ambassador for the Childhood Cancer Association.

Through her courage and generosity, 25-year-old Jemima uses her lived experience to raise funds for cancer research and support families facing childhood cancer.

Edward Robinson

Space educator and entrepreneur

Edward Robinson, 23, is helping students make sense of textbook maths and science by bringing real world engineering into classrooms.

Edward developed a passion for space in high school and set about building his own rocket. Soon after starting an electrical and mechatronic engineering degree, he began to see how the equations he was learning in textbooks could actually apply in real life. He thought others might benefit from practical, hands-on experiences too. So, in 2022, he founded his company Robinson Aerospace, which manufactures an educational satellite kit called RASCube that enables students to build a functional satellite replica, collect live data and run experiments.

He has delivered more than 1700 space education kits to over 200 schools in 18 countries, allowing tens of thousands of students to design and analyse genuine space systems.

In his programs, students develop the same problem-solving, teamwork and technical skills used by professional engineers, making advanced STEM education accessible, regardless of a school's location or resources.

2027 AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS**Jordan Box**

Community engagement champion

Jordan Box has dedicated his life to service, holding various roles from grassroots initiatives to national efforts in youth development, emergency services and disaster relief.

Joining St John Ambulance as a teenager, Jordan has trained cadets and volunteers for over 20 years, and served as post commander, coordinating a diverse national team during the Black Saturday bushfires. His continuing service extends to Scouting, Australian Defence Force (ADF) Cadets, and Disaster Relief Australia.

Using his experiences in the ADF for the benefit of others, 37-year-old Jordan helped establish para-biathlon pathways for wounded veterans, and actively supports veterans and their families through Legacy and the RSL.

Jordan exemplifies service before self, demonstrating the transformative impact of active community engagement.

Neil Davis

Violence prevention advocate

Neil Davis is helping reshape youth culture to prevent violence. When Neil's 17-year-old son, Sam, was fatally hit with a single punch thrown by a gate crasher at a party, Neil was determined to create something positive out of the senseless loss.

In 2008, he established The Sammy D Foundation to change attitudes towards violence. By sharing his lived experience, he helps young people to see the lifelong impact of one moment, one punch, one decision and challenges young people who see violence as normal or even acceptable to think differently. Neil provides the tools and confidence to pause, walk away, seek help and choose a safer path.

Neil, 63, has delivered his powerful message in more than 2,000 presentations to young people in schools, sporting clubs and juvenile justice programs. In doing so, he is helping change the way young Australians think about violence, choices and responsibility.

Fahim Hashimy

Media changemaker

Fahim Hashimy, 48, is a journalist, film maker and the founder of FardaTV, an online news outlet for multicultural communities in South Australia..

After arriving in Adelaide from Afghanistan in 2008, Fahim was interested by the history of the Afghan cameleers who explored South Australia in the 1800s. Fascinated by this connection between his homeland and his new home, Fahim drew on his journalistic background to create the documentary film *Afghan Cameleers* in 2014, showing that diversity has always been part of Australia's story.

In 2009, Fahim launched FardaTV in Adelaide to connect multicultural communities and educate new Australians about Australian rights and responsibilities. FardaTV produces programming in up to eight languages, with Fahim volunteering countless hours as he coordinates production from his boutique studio.

In 2016, he launched the Ghan International Film Festival Australia which has grown from a small community gathering into an annual six-day festival with screenings in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. The festival shares the work of silenced Afghan filmmakers with the outside world.

Andrew Plastow

Education leader

Proud Kamilaroi man Andrew Plastow is a visionary and courageous educator who has boldly re-envisioned learning, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

As principal of Alberton Primary School from 2004 to 2019, Andrew transformed the struggling school into a centre of excellence. Then, when pressed to align the school with a universal teaching approach, Andrew instead worked for 18 months to establish Ngutu College, an independent K–12 school on Kurna Country in Woodville North.

Since 2021, Ngutu has offered innovative learning rooted in context and community. Over 300 students are enrolled from kindergarten to year 12, with 50% coming from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Ngutu places Aboriginal knowledge at the heart of the curriculum, with students showcasing their work in performances and exhibitions that build community connection and local pride.

Andrew, 57, has set new standards in child-centred, culturally informed and equitable learning – transforming the lives of children, their families and communities.