Australian of the Year Awards

Reflect. Respect. Celebrate

South Australia

ADELAIDE CONVENTION CENTRE

5 November 2026

2027

MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER

On behalf of all South Australians, I congratulate our state's nominees for the 2027 Australian of the Year Awards.

These awards recognise Australians whose service, leadership and achievements have made a real difference to the lives of others.

For more than six decades, they have celebrated people from all walks of life who have helped shape their communities and our nation for the better.

South Australia has a proud history in the Australian of the Year Awards, and this year's nominees continue that tradition.

They come from different backgrounds, generations and fields, but they share a common commitment: to use their skills, experience and passion to improve the lives of others.

Their contributions may take different forms, but each has made a lasting impact – through service, advocacy, innovation, leadership or simply by seeing something that could be better and choosing to do something about it.

That spirit of service is something South Australians can be immensely proud of.

Our state is stronger because of people who give their time, energy and expertise to others, often without seeking recognition or reward.

To each of our South Australian nominees – congratulations on this well-deserved honour.

Thank you for everything you have contributed to our state and our nation, and for the example you set for others.

I wish you all the very best for the 2027 Australian of the Year Awards.

The Honourable Peter Malinauskas MP
Premier of South Australia



2027

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the 2027 Australian of the Year Awards for South Australia.

It is a great honour to chair the Australia Day Council of South Australia and to recognise the 16 remarkable nominees.

The Australian of the Year Awards shine a light on Australians whose contributions make our communities, our state and our nation stronger. Many of our finalists have also touched lives far beyond South Australia, making a meaningful impact nationally and internationally.

To every finalist, I offer my heartfelt congratulations and sincere thanks. This evening provides an opportunity to honour your extraordinary stories, celebrate your achievements and recognise the difference you continue to make. Your dedication inspires us and reflects the very best of South Australia.

The Awards recognise outstanding Australians across four categories: Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year and Local Hero. To be nominated is itself a significant acknowledgement of the generosity, service and commitment you bring to your community and to our nation.

These awards also remind us of the people, stories and issues that matter most to our communities. They demonstrate that lasting change can begin with one person, one idea and the courage to keep going. Each finalist reminds us that we all have the capacity to make a difference and to leave our communities better than we found them.

Tonight, we celebrate exceptional individuals who reflect the heart, diversity, spirit and generosity of South Australia.

On behalf of the Board, I extend my warmest congratulations to all South Australian nominees. Thank you for your passion, courage, leadership and unwavering commitment to improving the lives of others.

We are proud to recognise your achievements, celebrate your contribution and share your stories with the South Australian community.

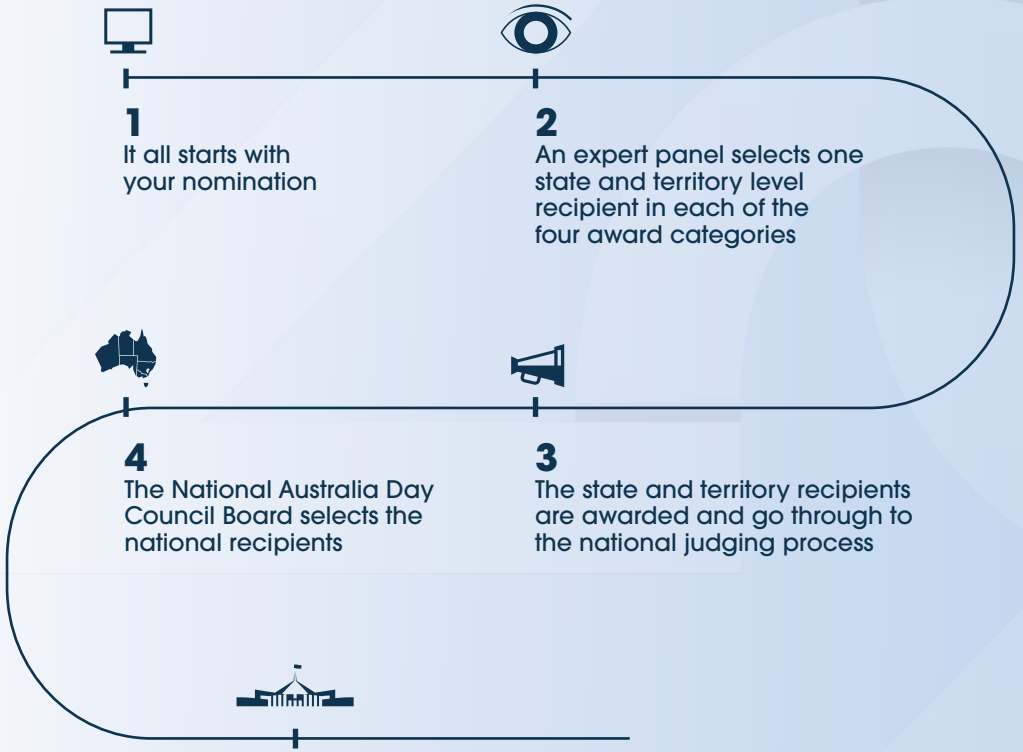


Michelle Cox
Chair
Australia Day Council of South Australia



2027

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

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

4
The National Australia Day Council Board selects the national recipients

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

For more information on Australia Day, the Story of Australia campaign 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 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples



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, 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 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, 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.



*Photo credit: Jodie Allan

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, 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.

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, 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 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 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, 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, 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, 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, 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 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.

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

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 2027 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 2027 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 STATE'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 South Australia for the past five years. The full honour roll can be viewed at **australianoftheyear.org.au**

Australian of the Year

2026	Katherine Bennell-Pegg – Astronaut
2025	Professor Leah Bromfield – Child protection expert
2024	Tim Jarvis AM – Environmental scientist and advocate
2023	Taryn Brumfitt – Body image activist, director, writer and speaker
2022	Professor Helen Marshall AM – Vaccination researcher

Senior Australian of the Year

2026	Malcolm Benoy – Meteorological researcher
2026	James Currie – Sound designer
2025	Charles Jackson OAM – Indigenous advocate and knowledge holder
2024	Sister Meredith Evans – Sister of Mercy
2023	Sandra Miller – Aboriginal rights activist, advocate for Indigenous health and welfare
2022	Mark Le Messurier – Educator, counsellor and author

Young Australian of the Year

2026	Chloe Wyatt-Jasper – Mental health advocate
2025	Amber Brock-Fabel – Founder, South Australian Youth Forum
2024	Tiahni Adamson – Wildlife conservation biologist
2023	Awer Mabil – Professional soccer player and co-founder, Barefoot to Boots
2022	Dr Trudy Lin – Special Needs Dentistry

Australia's Local Hero

2026	Ayesha Safdar – Community leader
2025	Sobia Hashmi and Irfan Hashmi – Pharmacists and migrant community leaders
2024	Rachael Zaltron OAM – Founder, Backpacks 4 SA Kids
2023	Christine Robertson OAM – Co-founder, Lost Pets of South Australia and creator of the Chipblitz program
2022	Monique Bareham – President of Lymphoedema Association SA Inc.

* 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

OFFICE FOR YOUTH

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Department of Home Affairs

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ACM

Australian National University

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