

MEDIA RELEASE

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**VICTORIA'S NOMINEES FOR
2022 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS ANNOUNCED**

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Nominees for the 2022 Victoria Australian of the Year Awards include a young man making meals for healthcare workers, a koala conservationist, the founder of a Sikh volunteer group, a human rights advocate, an SES worker and the only man to win the tennis Golden Slam.

They are among 16 Victorians in the running to be named the Victoria Local Hero, Young Australian, Senior Australian or Australian of the Year.

The 2022 Victoria award nominees are:

Victoria Australian of the Year

Dylan Alcott OAM - Athlete, paralympian, philanthropist, media commentator and advocate (Melbourne)

Professor Bronwyn Fox - Chief Scientist at CSIRO and public speaker (Hawthorn, Melbourne)

Nyadol Nyuon - Human rights and refugee advocate (Lynbrook)

Kimbarlie (Kim) O'Reilly - Domestic violence survivor, advocate (Melbourne/Mildura)

Victoria Young Australian of the Year

Alex Dekker - Founder of Alex Makes Meals (Clayton)

Libby Fisher - Koala and wildlife conservationist (Diamond Creek)

Keeden Graham - Indigenous youth mentor (Torquay)

Ahmed Hassan - Co-founder and executive director of Youth Activating Youth (Brunswick)

Victoria Senior Australian of the Year

Sister Brigid Arthur - Asylum seeker activist (Albert Park)

Gaye Hamilton - Deputy Chancellor of Victoria University (Inverloch)

Mabel Hibbert - Community volunteer (Oakleigh)

Dr Helen Kouzmin - Specialist physician (East Ivanhoe)

Victoria Local Hero

Leo op den Brouw - Volunteer with the Mallacoota State Emergency Service (Mallacoota)

Phaik See (Cecilia) Chuah - Community volunteer (Brunswick West, Melbourne)

Grant Hansen - Musician and broadcaster (Derrimut, Melbourne)

Jaswinder Singh - Co-founder and secretary of Sikh Volunteers Australia (Hallam)

**see bios on following pages*

The nominees are among 129 people being recognised across all states and territories as part of the program, which began in 1960.

The four award recipients from Victoria will be announced on the evening of Wednesday 10 November 2021 in an online, livestreamed ceremony.

They will then join the other state and territory recipients as national finalists for the national awards announcement on 25 January 2022.

National Australia Day Council CEO Karlie Brand congratulated the Victorian nominees for their achievements and contributions.

“The Victorian nominees are extraordinary people whose accomplishments are inspirational,” said Ms Brand.

“They lead by example and make pathways for others.

“They remind us that greatness comes in many forms and that we all have something to give.”

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

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Nominee [bios on the following pages](#) and can also be viewed from australianoftheyear.org.au.

Nominee [photos can be downloaded](#) from this link (note all photos provided by nominees):
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/g90kldszoytc2sh/AAB3kRN8XY1MUrF89vXXoFH9a?dl=0>

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VICTORIA AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS

Dylan Alcott OAM

Athlete, paralympian, philanthropist, media commentator and advocate

As a teenager, Dylan Alcott hated being in a wheelchair because he didn't see anyone like him in mainstream media. Then sport changed everything.

A gold medal at the Paralympic Games in wheelchair basketball preceded three more in Paralympic competition after a cross-code switch to tennis. Now, with 23 quad wheelchair Grand Slam titles and a Newcombe Medal, Dylan Alcott recently became the first male in history, in any form of tennis, to win the Golden Slam.

Amid his training and competition load as a world-class athlete, Dylan notes that his most profound impact has come from beyond the field of play. He founded the Dylan Alcott Foundation to provide scholarships and grant funding to marginalised Australians with a disability.

He also authored his best-selling autobiography, *Able*, and co-founded Get Skilled Access. In addition, the 30 year old's AbilityFest is Australia's first and only inclusive, fully accessible music festival. In realising his childhood dream, Dylan holds several high-profile media roles spanning TV, radio and podcasting.

Professor Bronwyn Fox

Chief Scientist at CSIRO and public speaker

CSIRO Chief Scientist Professor Bronwyn Fox has pioneered world-first digital techniques to 3D-print carbon fibre composites with the CSIRO and Swinburne University.

The 50 year old has created a growing, globally networked, manufacturing ecosystem in advanced composites which consists of extremely strong but lightweight fibre-reinforced plastics, used in high-performance products like aircraft, satellites and sporting equipment.

Bronwyn has established two public-private partnership platforms which have put Australia at the forefront of engineering achievement. The research precinct, Carbon Nexus, is valued at \$100 million and has created 1,400 new jobs. Meanwhile, the \$15-million Industry 4.0 Composites Testlab has generated two industry hubs in aerospace and hydrogen, creating \$18 million worth of projects.

Bronwyn is the face of Business Events Australia's 'Launching a New Era in Manufacturing' campaign. Her ability to communicate is evident in the success of her projects – and her inspirational TEDx talks. Bronwyn is a Fellow and the Chair of the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering (Victorian Division), and a Fellow of the Royal Australian Chemical Institute.

Nyadol Nyuon

Human rights and refugee advocate

Lawyer, writer, speaker, volunteer, mother of two and former refugee, Nyadol Nyuon is an advocate for human rights, multiculturalism, refugees and those seeking asylum.

Born in a refugee camp in Ethiopia after her family escaped the Sudanese Civil War, Nyadol arrived in Melbourne in 2005 where she completed a law degree at the University of Melbourne.

In 2018, after speaking publicly on race and human rights issues – including exaggerated media coverage of so-called African gangs and COVID-19 law-breakers – she was the target of racist online harassment and abuse.

Despite this, 33 year old Nyadol has continued to be a powerful voice for human rights. She's an Advisory Committee Member of the Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law and Chair of Harmony Alliance – Australia's migrant and refugee women's coalition, where she's empowering migrant women, including improving their digital literacy.

Nyadol has won the Harmony Alliance Award, the Afro-Australian Student Organisation's Unsung Hero Award and was co-winner of the Tim McCoy Prize.

Kimbarlie O'Reilly

Domestic violence survivor, advocate

Kimbarlie (Kim) O'Reilly almost lost her life due to a former partner's violence. The horrific assault hospitalised Kim, leaving her with PTSD and ongoing physical issues. At the same time, her abuser was supported by the local football club, allowing him to play while on bail and facing charges for the assault.

The club's decision was a catalyst for Kim to act. The 38 year old is campaigning for a national policy to ban players from sport while facing charges of violence, and for convicted players to be banned from clubs altogether.

Kim's campaign 'It's never OK' invites sporting clubs to step up and take a stand against violence. By June 2021, five of the 15 sporting clubs in the Mildura region had already signed their names on the 'no violence tolerance' policy.

Kim was also invited to Parliament House to discuss this policy. Her courageous response gives strength and hope to all those affected by domestic violence.

VICTORIA YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS**Alex Dekker**

Founder of Alex Makes Meals

Alex Dekker first began preparing meals for his sister while she was working as a nurse at a screening clinic during the COVID-19 pandemic. Shocked that she only had time to eat a single muesli bar during her 15-hour shift, Alex was inspired to act.

He soon started offering cooked meals to other healthcare workers during their shifts, before launching his social enterprise, Alex Makes Meals. Today, 21 year old Alex not only feeds medical staff but other frontline workers, international students, disadvantaged youth, and people who are homeless. To meet the demand, he now cooks from two kitchens.

Since its inception, Alex Makes Meals has provided more than 250,000 meals to those who need them. He expertly coordinates the fundraising efforts, volunteer management, kitchen facilities and delivery vehicles to ensure his charity is a success.

Through his selflessness, drive and passion for the cause, Alex is a fine example of leadership and entrepreneurship during difficult times.

Libby Fisher

Koala and wildlife conservationist

In 2015, Libby Fisher went on a family holiday to Queensland that included a visit to the Australia Zoo. It was there she fell in love with koalas – but she soon learned they were a vulnerable species in New South Wales and Queensland.

At 11 years old, Libby decided to raise funds and awareness for the plight of koalas by making and selling items at markets. She also started meeting wildlife carers and rescuers to learn more. As Libby's passion for all types of wildlife grew, so did her desire to help. She created a charity called Libby's Koala & Wildlife Crusade.

Since then, Libby has taken on many practical projects, involving her local community wherever possible. To date, she has raised more than \$65,000 in cash, plus tens of thousands worth of supplies which she has donated to volunteer rescuers and carers around the country.

Now 16, Libby uses her passion for wildlife to engage her community and bring everyone together.

Keeden Graham

Indigenous youth mentor

A proud Yorta-Yorta, Wiradjuri, and Dja Dja Wurrung man, Keeden Graham works tirelessly to elevate and mentor young Aboriginal people. He does this largely through his role as manager and deputy CEO of Strong Brother Strong Sister.

Set up in Geelong in 2017, Strong Brother Strong Sister is a 100 per cent Aboriginal-owned-and-operated organisation, that provides a culturally appropriate and safe place to help Aboriginal young people thrive.

Keeden is also an active board member of the Ngarrimili Charity, offering programs and support to current and aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses across Victoria. In addition, he's a member of the Victorian Youth Congress, working closely with the Minister for Youth, as well as a former council member of the Youth Council at the Commission for Children and Young People.

Possessing natural leadership skills, 22 year old Keeden's passion for Aboriginal culture shines through in all his work. He gives young people the opportunity to learn and immerse themselves in their culture.

Ahmed Hassan

Co-founder and executive director of Youth Activating Youth

Dedicated, hardworking and fearless, 25 year old Ahmed Hassan has a clear vision on how to best assist and advocate for disadvantaged young people from multicultural backgrounds. He possesses an innate ability to relate and connect, passing on critical life skills around education, employment, health and wellbeing.

In 2014, at the age of 18, Ahmed co-founded Youth Activating Youth, alongside fellow community leader and current CEO, Ali Ahmed.

Youth Activating Youth offers support to marginalised and disadvantaged young people – particularly those who consistently fall through the cracks. It provides them with the essential skills needed to build self-confidence and self-sufficiency. Originally a youth-led committee, Youth Activating Youth has grown into an established not-for-profit organisation with a committed team and a diverse and multidisciplinary board.

Born in the northern suburbs of Melbourne to parents from Somalia and Eritrea, Ahmed is driven by a desire to form social cohesion, bridge cultural divides and achieve the best outcomes for young people from multicultural backgrounds across Victoria.

VICTORIA SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS**Sister Brigid Arthur**

Asylum seeker activist

Sister Brigid Arthur is a tenacious fighter for the rights of some of our community's most vulnerable members. Brigid is part of the Brigidine order of nuns, who have been engaged in education and social justice in Victoria since 1886.

Brigid taught for many years in the western suburbs of Melbourne, where she lived among new migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, learning about the difficulties that many faced. In 2001, she was a founding member of the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project, providing practical support to asylum seekers, including emergency funds, food and housing.

Brigid is a former long-term board member of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and a litigation guardian for young Indigenous people and young people seeking climate action. Her support for many asylum seekers who need a representative in Federal Court matters has helped them obtain critical, urgent care in Australia.

With patience, courage and compassion, 87 year old Brigid continues to care for asylum seekers embodying the motto of the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project: 'Strength and kindness'.

Gaye Hamilton

Deputy Chancellor of Victoria University

No-one can question Gaye Hamilton's unwavering enthusiasm for Melbourne's west – whether as Deputy Chancellor of Victoria University, Chair of the Western Bulldogs Community Foundation, or Director of the Victorian Government's State Sports Centres Trust.

Across her many, diverse undertakings throughout her working life, last year proved to be Gaye's greatest test. The COVID-19 pandemic hit many industries hard, including tertiary institutions. At Victoria University, she navigated the breadth and complexity of pandemic-related issues through 2020 and beyond.

Victoria University went on to be voted number one in Australia for employability – a remarkable achievement in a sector hit hard by COVID-19.

Meanwhile, as Chair of the Western Bulldogs Community Foundation, she has supported and guided the organisation to redirect all programs to digital creative platforms. This has ensured it maintains engagement with the community and those in need, even during Victoria's extensive lockdowns.

With generosity, humility and a team-oriented spirit, 71 year old Gaye is driven by social justice and the development of Melbourne's west.

Mabel Hibbert

Community volunteer

Mabel Hibbert has lived an extraordinary life. Her influence as a volunteer spans many decades, and she's become affectionately known to her local community as 'Marvellous Mabel'.

In 2015, aged 91, she inspired many with her visit to Gallipoli to be where her father landed on ANZAC Day in 1915. Following the trip, Mabel flew to the United Kingdom to spend time with her penfriend's son, whom she'd sent a hand-knitted toy to in the 1940s, and his family.

To this day, her love of knitting has never wavered. Now aged 97, Mabel has knitted thousands of 'Trauma Teddies' at her own expense, to be sent to children experiencing challenging times. During Australia's involvement in the war in Afghanistan, she also sent knitted beanies and gloves for frontline soldiers.

For more than 65 years, Mabel has been active in her church group, the Mothers' Union, as a committee member, treasurer and president. The group engages in various community initiatives, including helping improve literacy among Indigenous students.

Dr Helen Kouzmin

Specialist physician

Specialist physician Dr Helen Kouzmin is outstandingly generous, caring and dedicated. She practices according to the highest professional and personal ethics, and combines her love of people with medical brilliance.

Born in Bulgaria in 1942, her family fled Stalin's regime and endured years of hardship before arriving in Australia in 1950. After her father was tragically killed in a mining accident, Helen took responsibility for her three siblings and grieving mother.

The family moved to Melbourne where Helen studied medicine, graduating as the top female student. After a residency at the Royal Melbourne Hospital she practiced for eight years at the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital.

Helen's exceptional ability to diagnose complex conditions and the time and care she gives her patients has helped save countless lives and clear up misdiagnoses. Despite 50 years of experience and enormous medical knowledge, 79 year old Helen continuously engages in research and professional development. She still practices in the GP clinic that she opened in the 1980s.

VICTORIA LOCAL HERO – NOMINEE BIOS

Leo op den Brouw

Volunteer with the Mallacoota State Emergency Service

For 35 years, Leo op den Brouw has been an active volunteer with the Mallacoota State Emergency Service. He's served as its unit controller since 2017.

Leo's dedication and inspirational leadership were on display during and after the 2019–20 bushfires, when the Mallacoota community faced one of its greatest challenges. On New Year's Eve 2019, a huge out-of-control bushfire devastated the Mallacoota township and surrounding region. The fire brought down 123 homes and burnt 83 per cent of the land.

It also destroyed businesses, farms and livelihoods, while decimating recreation facilities, wilderness areas and wildlife. Ongoing road closures and fire threats meant Mallacoota and its nearby communities were cut off for around five weeks.

Fortunately, due to the preparedness, coordination and decisive action of local community leaders like Leo, no lives were lost, and injuries were minimal.

Following the bushfire, 67 year old Leo continues to be an integral part of ensuring local collaborative solutions are at the heart of the Mallacoota community's response and recovery.

Phaik See Chuah (Cecilia)

Community volunteer

One night in May 2020, Phaik See Chuah (Cecilia) was delivering meals for her Malaysian food business when she noticed some homeless people sitting in the Queen Victoria Market car park. She went home, began cooking and drove back to give four containers of fried rice to them.

Since that day, Cecilia leaves her work every Tuesday afternoon to go home and cook meals before handing them out to the homeless at 6.30pm at the Queen Victoria Market car park. Her meals feed around 100 people every week, most of whom affectionately know her as 'Cece'.

Cecilia is not associated with any church or charitable organisation, but simply acts out of the goodness of her heart. To provide the weekly service, the 49 year old gathers a group of friends who volunteer out of a genuine desire to help the most vulnerable in the community.

Cecilia, with the help of her team, aims to continue providing this service while continuing to work full-time and care for her two children.

Grant Hansen

Musician and broadcaster

For over 30 years, Grant Hansen has worked as a radio and television broadcaster, musician and band manager. A Taungarung man, he's recognised as a strong leader and activist in the media and entertainment sector for Aboriginal people.

Grant was the first Aboriginal person to work on commercial radio in Victoria with the Marngrook Footy Show, alongside Leila Gurruwiwi. Over several decades, he's been a leading voice for Aboriginal people in the sports industry and has created many opportunities for others to work in the Australian Football League media.

In addition, Grant has pursued life through music as a leading Indigenous musician. His band Blackfire was one of Australia's most successful Indigenous acts of the 1990s. In 1998, it was awarded a NAIDOC award for Artist of the Year and a South Pacific Music Award for the song 'My Island Paradise'.

By creating education and training pathways, 56 year old Grant continues to improve the lives of Indigenous people through music and sport.

Jaswinder Singh

Co-founder and secretary of Sikh Volunteers Australia

Guided by the Sikh philosophy of selfless service, or 'seva', Jaswinder Singh delivers food to disadvantaged groups – including international students, older people, single parents and people who are homeless – through Sikh Volunteers Australia.

Since its inception, Sikh Volunteers Australia has offered free food and support to individuals and communities most at need. This has included during major disasters such as the Victorian bushfires, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and recent flooding in Victoria and New South Wales.

When COVID-19 struck Melbourne in March 2020, Jaswinder and his team of volunteers focused their efforts on helping people in need of food and other goods during lockdown restrictions. By the end of that year, Sikh Volunteers Australia had delivered more than 140,000 meals directly to people in need.

Through Sikh Volunteers Australia, 37 year old Jaswinder galvanises and inspires individuals, communities and businesses to come together, volunteering their time, funds, food and acceptance to support anyone experiencing disadvantage and hardship.