

MEDIA RELEASE
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2026 AUSTRALIANS OF THE YEAR FOR ACT ANNOUNCED

2026 Australian of the Year for ACT - Professor Rose McGready (Thailand)
2026 Senior Australian of the Year for ACT - Heather Reid AM (Kiels Mountain)
2026 Young Australian of the Year for ACT - Sita Sargeant (Canberra)
2026 Local Hero for ACT - Ben Alexander (Forrest)

Awards event livestreamed via australianoftheyear.org.au

The 2026 Australian of the Year Award recipients for the Australian Capital Territory have been announced at a ceremony in Canberra this evening.

The ACT 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 ACT is migrant and refugee health expert Professor Rose McGready.

Professor Rose McGready, 61, has spent three decades providing health services to displaced people in the border region between Thailand and Myanmar.

Arriving as a young doctor, Rose discovered that refugees who had fled persecution in Myanmar had difficulty accessing medical assistance in Thailand. In response, Rose established training for local staff to focus on services for expectant mothers and in the critical period of childbirth. Over the past 31 years, she has built a network of locally run clinics and out-patient services which have saved thousands of lives.

Rose's research has also led to new treatments being developed to tackle maternal malaria. Her findings have been adopted by the World Health Organisation as the global standard for combatting the disease, helping to treat millions of women around the world.

Rose's commitment, compassion and clinical expertise provide life-saving aid to some of the most vulnerable communities in the world.

Football pioneer Heather Reid AM is the 2026 Senior Australian of the Year for ACT.

Heather Reid has made it possible for thousands of women to play football, both in the Australian Capital Territory and around Australia.

Heather was instrumental in establishing the Australian National University Women's Soccer Club in 1978 and the Australian Capital Territory Women's Soccer Association a year later. As the first female CEO of Capital Football in 2004, she brought together four associations into a single peak body and secured Canberra United's inclusion in the national W-League, helping to promote the game to a wider audience.

Heather, 69, has continued to support and mentor players, coaches and administrators, both locally and internationally. She set up the Heather Reid AM Bursary to help pay the registration fees of players in need of assistance, ensuring that financial hardship is not a barrier to participation.

Heather's vision and dedication to inclusion and equality have opened pathways for thousands of women to take part in sport.

The 2026 Young Australian of the Year for ACT is historian and guide Sita Sargeant.

Sita Sargeant is forging a distinctive approach to storytelling and historical research, highlighting little-known women's stories and their impact on towns and cities across Australia.

She is the founder of She Shapes History, a historical tourism company and social enterprise dedicated to uncovering the often-overlooked stories of women who have shaped Australia in ways that receive little or no recognition. Through walking tours, digital content, and partnerships with cultural institutions and historic sites, 28-year-old Sita reveals how women's contributions have long been ignored by mainstream history.

Having taken more than 10,000 people on tours, She Shapes History has expanded to Sydney and Melbourne with a team of dedicated guides. Sita has also published a book spotlighting the stories of more than 250 women who have shaped history in 31 towns and cities across Australia.

Her passion, energy, and storytelling prowess are helping Australians see the full picture of their history, creating a richer, more inclusive understanding of the nation's identity

Mental health advocate Ben Alexander is the 2026 Local Hero for ACT.

Ben Alexander is well known in Canberra for his rugby career with the Brumbies and Wallabies.

Since retiring, he has turned his focus to mental health, co-founding Running for Resilience (R4R) with Matt Breen to help make Canberra suicide-free by 2033.

R4R helps people overcome personal struggles by exercising and connecting with others. Every week, hundreds join free runs and walks across Canberra to boost their physical and mental health.

Through podcasts, newsletters and community events, Ben shares practical ways to connect, manage energy and support others. Open about his own challenges after rugby, 41-year-old Ben now uses that experience to help others find connection, purpose and hope. His work is building a stronger, more supportive community where no one feels they have to face tough times alone.

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

"Rose has spent half a lifetime providing much-needed medical care to some of the most vulnerable people in the world; Heather was a leading light in shaping women's football and continues to support players in need; Sita is ensuring the stories of women in our history are remembered and recognised; and Ben is building connection and support for those battling with mental health challenges," said Mark.

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

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