Australian of the Year Awards

Reflect. Respect. Celebrate

Northern Territory

MINDIL BEACH CASINO RESORT

9 November 2026

2027

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF MINISTER

Territorians are incredibly proud of the place we call home.

The Northern Territory is reflected in every part of our identity, our lifestyle, and our strong communities.

From the red sands at the heart of our great continent, to the wetlands of Kakadu and the mangroves of the Arafura Sea, the Northern Territory is one of Australia's most remarkable places.

Yet what makes the Territory truly special is our people, the Territorians who go above and beyond to help those around them.

The Northern Territory nominees for the Australian of the Year Awards represent the very best of us and our communities.

Whether across health, leadership, First Nations communities, volunteering and community service, these outstanding Territorians have shown compassion and an unwavering commitment to making a difference.

They strengthen our diverse communities, and help make the Territory a kinder, more connected place.

This is something worth recognising and celebrating, and the Australian of the Year Awards provide a fitting tribute to those whose dedicated service helps make the Northern Territory a better place for us all.

To all nominees, your family, friends and fellow Territorians are incredibly proud of you and deeply grateful for everything you do for our communities.

Through the quiet and selfless examples that you set, each of you embody the Territorian spirit of lending a helping hand, looking after your neighbours, and making a positive difference to this special place we all call home.

Congratulations, and thank you for all you do for the Territory and our people.

The Honourable Lia Finocchiaro
Chief Minister
Northern Territory



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

These 2027 Australian of the Year Awards allow Australians living in the Northern Territory of Australia to be recognised for their contribution to the nation by their fellow Australians.

I was amazed and humbled at the quality of the nominations submitted for these inspirational Australians. Their stories are the stories of the real Australia.

I pay tribute to nominees and acknowledge all the nominations received as they were all worthy of recognition. There can only be one recipient in each category, but the reality is that all those nominated have contributed in their unique way to the wellbeing of this nation in their chosen fields.

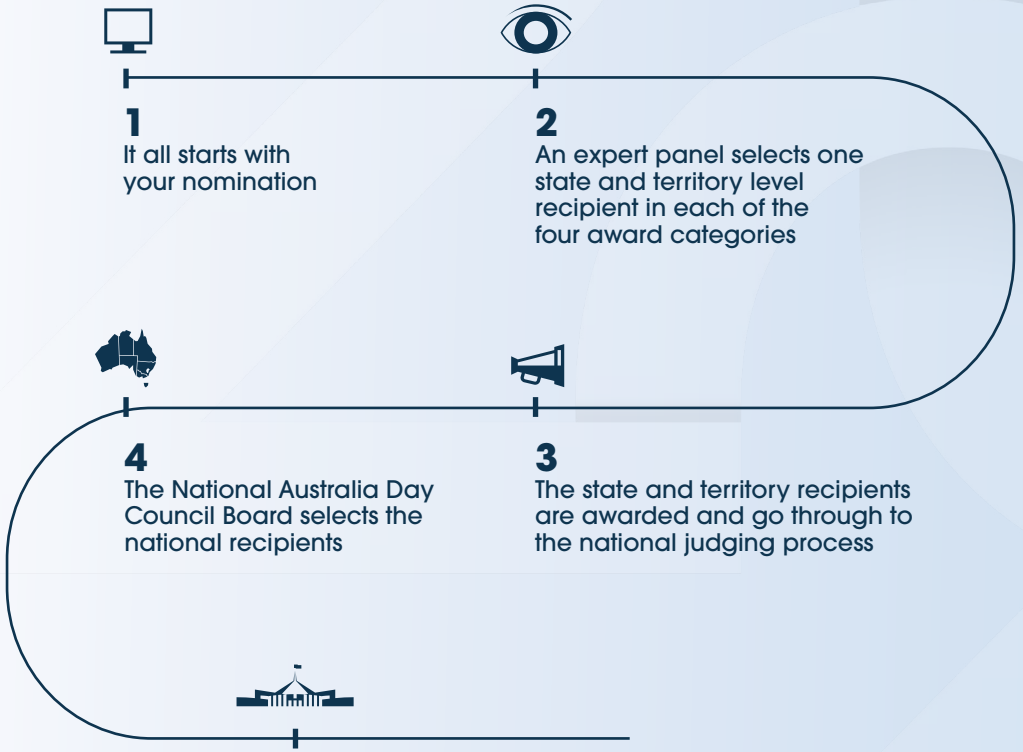
I offer my personal thanks and that of the Australia Day Council to the nominees. I commend those who took the time to highlight these men and women by nominating them. And most importantly I want to recognise those men and women gathered here tonight who represent and inspire all Australians in the Northern Territory and provide role models for future generations of Australians.

Seán Parnell OAM
Chair
Australia Day Council
Northern Territory



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

BYRON DAVIS
First Nations employment advocate



Byron Davis is a proud Kalkadoon Wannyi man and respected leader who has dedicated more than 30 years to advancing opportunities, inclusion and equity for First Nations Australians. Throughout his career, he has worked across community development, education, justice, employment and advocacy, creating pathways that empower individuals, strengthen communities and improve long-term outcomes.

Through his leadership, Byron has championed culturally-safe workplaces, expanded employment and career opportunities, and fostered greater understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Drawing on both professional expertise and lived experience, he is recognised for driving meaningful and lasting change.

A published author and thought leader, Byron has contributed to national conversations on reconciliation, cultural safety and sustainable Indigenous participation. Beyond his professional achievements, he is a mentor, community advocate and role model who uses his influence to inspire others, break down barriers and help create stronger, more inclusive communities for future generations.

HELEN LAMECH
Diabetes educator



Helen Lamech is a nurse whose education leadership has transformed diabetes care in Central Australia. Dedicating more than 30 years to nursing in the Northern Territory and the last decade to diabetes education, Helen has improved health outcomes for over 2000 people facing significant cultural and geographical barriers. Helen established the region's first nurse-led type 1 diabetes clinic and has mentored more than 30 diabetes educators and over 300 health professionals. Her trauma-informed, culturally-responsive approach has reduced hospital admissions, improved safety and equipped families to manage diabetes with confidence.

Working alongside Aboriginal health workers, elders and schools, Helen co-designs programs that honour culture, build trust and create community-led pathways to better diabetes management. Helen delivers care flexibly in clinics, homes, schools and community spaces, to ensure people feel safe, respected and in control of their health. Through proactive education and early intervention, Helen has dramatically enhanced the safety and wellbeing of thousands across the Territory.

DR JOEL LIDDLE
Indigenous language waymaker



Dr Joel Liddle is an Arrernte Australian academic, researcher and language advocate whose work has made profound contributions to Indigenous wellbeing and Indigenous language visibility. Working on the frontline of language and knowledge revitalisation in Central Australia, Joel addresses a problem with far-reaching consequences: the loss of Indigenous knowledge systems and the dilution of the languages that carry them. He builds the tools to reverse it, digital platforms like Indigemoji, and community projects like the Arrernte street signs, promoting language literacy, maintenance and transmission.

In 2023, Joel published the first peer reviewed academic journal article written entirely in an Australian Indigenous language, an Arrernte translation of his co-authored research. His doctoral research found that the loss of Indigenous knowledge negatively impacts Indigenous mental health and wellbeing, and the consequences affect all Australians. His work now extends across the region supporting language initiatives, repatriating knowledge held in ethnographic archives, and ensuring that Central Australia's languages, and the intimate knowledge of this landscape they carry, remain strong, so that all Australians can come to appreciate the complexity, depth and richness of Indigenous societies.

JASON LORD
Founder, Arrernte Community Boxing Academy



Jason Lord is an Arrernte man, a respected mentor and boxing coach of Alice Springs, who has transformed his own life to help change the future of at-risk young people. Once a troubled teenager, he found balance, discipline and hope through boxing. Jason now leads the Arrernte Community Boxing Academy, a safe space for Indigenous youth in Central Australia.

The academy welcomes people of all ages, backgrounds and cultures, and is grounded in three pillars: culture, care and control. Under Jason's leadership, the academy has become a lifeline, offering mentorship, emotional support and a sense of belonging that keeps young people connected and out of harm's way.

Working with school kids on the streets and remote communities, Jason uses the boxing ring to teach resilience, cultural pride and emotional regulation. His mission is to give others the second chance that once saved him.

JOYCE CHIN
Pioneering female educator



Born in Pine Creek in 1940, Joyce Chin (nee Ah Toy) pursued higher education in the face of parental opposition, leaving home at age 17 to study at Adelaide Teachers' College. After teaching in Northern Territory high schools, Joyce became the Northern Territory's first full-time female adult education teacher.

During her 34-year career at Darwin Community College, Darwin Institute of Technology and Northern Territory University, Joyce rose to Associate Dean.

Joyce introduced the Territory's first award course in fashion, upgraded the qualification to a Diploma, helped graduates establish clothing businesses and was a founding member of the Northern Territory Fashion Awards. She also taught sewing to female prisoners. After retirement in 2001, Joyce instigated, participated in and promoted fitness classes for seniors, to maintain their strength and mobility. Numerous gyms now offer such classes to our ageing population.

Joyce's legacy has shaped women's education and cultural life across the Northern Territory.

CHARLES GUNABARRA OAM
Aboriginal health leader



Charles (Charlie) Gunabarra is a Maningrida man who has served in Aboriginal health care at the Maningrida Health Centre for a remarkable 50 years. In one of the Northern Territory's most impactful careers in remote health care, Charlie has managed major programs including leprosy treatment and men's health.

Charlie played a pivotal role in the 2021 transition of primary health services from Northern Territory Health to community control under Mala'la Health Service. His leadership ensured that community voices guided every step. Charlie's cultural knowledge and wisdom were instrumental in the design of the Manayingkarirra Public Health Unit, which he opened in 2026, where he helped ensure the facility was culturally safe and welcoming.

Charlie continues to mentor the next generation of Aboriginal health workers and now serves on the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory Board, providing Territory-wide leadership in health advocacy and community engagement. His dedication, stability and cultural authority have strengthened health outcomes across Maningrida and the Northern Territory.

DR SAMUEL HEARD OAM
Health record innovator



Dr Samuel (Sam) Heard is a pioneering general practitioner and global health information innovator who has advanced the practice of healthcare.

Sam's interest in health records began in London in 1984, when he built a patient management and follow-up system on a secondhand computer. Sam led a general practitioner IT cooperative of 80 East London doctors, who together, through health record innovation, achieved London's highest immunisation and cervical screening rates for their low-socioeconomic community.

Returning to Australia, Sam continued his pioneering work in health record innovation, much of it in his own time. He co-authored openEHR, a specification for lifelong health records that can be used with any technology and in any language. In 2026, the OECD and WHO recognised openEHR as the international standard for health records. Furthermore, to support remote Territorians, Sam invented the H-box; a system that allows patients to receive medical advice and medication even when no health practitioner is physically present.

PATRICIA KING
Volunteer chaplain



Patricia (Pat) King has spent her life serving others, offering an unwavering commitment to helping people in their most vulnerable moments.

Pat was born in India to missionary parents who had survived a prisoner-of-war camp, instilling in her deep values of care, resilience and service. Moving to Darwin to study nursing, Pat found herself on the frontline of one of the Territory's darkest nights.

As a St John Ambulance volunteer on Christmas Eve 1974, Pat worked through Cyclone Tracy – taking emergency calls, treating the injured, triaging survivors, and helping families stay together during mass evacuations. Pat remained on duty for three days, providing care amid the devastation that left 66 people dead and thousands displaced.

Today, Pat serves as a volunteer chaplain, offering confidential support to police officers. She listens without judgement, encourages storytelling and uses her lived experience to guide others through their most difficult moments.

NAOMI DESTACAMENTO
Youth health and wellbeing advocate



Compassionate and driven, Naomi Destacamento is dedicated to creating healthier futures for young people across the Northern Territory. Born and raised in Alice Springs, Naomi has a deep understanding of the challenges young people face when navigating healthcare in regional and remote communities.

These experiences shaped Naomi's passion for health education and guide her advocacy today. As a registered nurse working in the same hospital where she was born, Naomi is committed to empowering young people with the knowledge and confidence to make informed decisions about their wellbeing.

As secretary of the NT Youth Round Table 2026 and a youth ambassador with the Central Youth Advocacy Network, Naomi promotes health literacy, strengthens youth voices and raises awareness of essential support services. Naomi is a strong advocate for respectful relationships education in schools, believing young people deserve accurate, age-appropriate information that builds safety, confidence and resilience.

JULES GABOR
Youth advocate



At 21 years old, Jules Gabor is amplifying the voices of young people and shining a light on youth homelessness, identity and mental wellbeing. Jules' work proves that the voices of the Northern Territory's youth are vital and need to be heard.

After moving from the Philippines to Darwin as a child, Jules experienced homelessness, mental health struggles and barriers to belonging. Today she uses her lived experience to advocate for a safer, more inclusive community. Jules has served on multiple advisory groups where she represents youth interests. These include advocating as a UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador, sitting on the 2023 NT Youth Round Table and joining the City of Darwin Youth Advisory Committee.

Jules is also working with 15 young people to produce the compelling YouTube series, *Heart to Heart: A WhyNot Series*. Here, Jules creates space for the voices, creativity and perspectives of young people to be seen, heard and taken seriously.

TAITT GREEN
Volunteer first responder



Taitt Green is a courageous young Territorian who demonstrates remarkable courage during major emergencies. Joining St John Ambulance cadets when he was eight years old, Taitt became the youngest cadet in the Territory to compete individually in the St John NT Youth Competition, where he placed in the top three.

In 2020, Taitt joined the Air Force Cadets, where he mentored and trained younger cadets and led parades. In 2024, Taitt added the NT Fire and Rescue Service and, in 2025, the NT Emergency Services to his volunteer efforts.

When a significant hay shed fire threatened large gas tanks in Katherine in late 2025, Taitt put his life on the line to help extinguish the blaze. Then, in the devastating Katherine floods of 2026, Taitt waded chest-deep through floodwaters to help a woman to safety.

When later deployed to Arnhem Land to help clean up after Tropical Cyclone Neville, Taitt missed his 18th birthday celebrations. His initiative, sacrifice and compassion embody the highest standards of community service.

ELISE THORNTHWAITE
Early childhood educator



Elise Thornthwaite is a proud Gamilaraay woman dedicated to culturally responsive, respectful early childhood education.

Currently on maternity leave from her role as an early childhood educator in Milikapiti, on Wulirankuwu Country in the Tiwi Islands, Elise believes learning is rooted in identity, family and culture. Working alongside Tiwi teachers, she embeds Tiwi language, culture and community knowledge into everyday learning through innovative, play-based programs combined with evidence-based literacy and numeracy strategies to strengthen school readiness.

Elise has worked closely with Elders, families and local organisations to support culturally responsive learning and strengthen connections between children, families and community. She has also contributed to wellbeing activities including community yoga and the Happy Box Project.

Alongside education, Elise is an emerging writer developing two young adult manuscripts centred on Aboriginal voices. She believes that when children see their culture reflected in learning, their identity and sense of belonging are strengthened.

JASON BONSON
First Nations men's health leader



Jason Bonson, a proud father, has worked in research, policy and practice supporting First Nations boys' and men's health for more than three decades, including voluntary community-focused roles.

In 2013–14, Jason co-founded the Darwin Men's Inter-Agency Network, now connecting over 180 members and 30 stakeholders across the Top End.

Jason leads Deadly Male, a national charitable initiative, launched at the National Men's Health Gathering in October 2025. He led and moderated the Gathering's First Nations stream, delivered keynote presentations, and coordinated and facilitated First Nations workshops. He co-led the Northern Territory Men's Health Roundtable with Flinders University.

Across the Northern Territory and Australia, Jason champions men's health through networks that elevate First Nations voices and support practical, community-led solutions. His work strengthens culturally safe environments and trusted connections that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men to talk, connect and lead healthier, more confident lives.

TRENT DE WITH
Community leader



Trent de With is a driving force behind community connection in Katherine, dedicating countless volunteer hours to creating events and initiatives that bring joy and friendship to local families.

Through the Katherine Community Projects Association, Trent unites volunteers and local businesses to deliver inclusive community activities – from Street Eats and Twilight on the Tracks to the Teddy Bears Picnic and Lego Day. The community's landmark event is the Christmas lights display and parade, which requires more than 250 volunteer hours to set up.

Trent donates prizes for raffles supporting children, families and community members in crisis, and coordinates school holiday programs and free Santa photos where every child receives a gift.

During the devastating March 2026 Katherine floods, Trent patrolled the town every two hours, providing updates to business owners. His leadership, generosity and tireless commitment ensure Katherine remains a fun, vibrant, safe and welcoming place for children and families.

MAJORS NIALL & MICHELLE GIBSON
Rural and remote chaplains



Majors Niall and Michelle Gibson serve as Salvation Army Flying Padre – rural and remote chaplains supporting some of Australia's most isolated communities across the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

Based in Katherine, Niall and Michelle can spend up to 100 hours in the air each year visiting around 80 remote cattle stations, schools, police stations, health centres and outback towns where internet and phone reception can be patchy.

Known for responding immediately after tragic station accidents, Niall and Michelle offer a listening ear, pastoral care and practical support to people who rarely receive visitors. They also conduct funerals, weddings and bush christenings, along with crisis support during events such as the Katherine floods.

Whether landing on tiny homestead strips or driving long distances, Niall and Michelle provide friendship, counselling and hope – quiet achievers bringing a listening ear and comfort to isolated people across Australia's vast Top End.

BENJAMIN HOCKEY
Community leader



When Katherine faced two major floods in March 2026, local business owner Benjamin (Ben) Hockey turned a simple offer of help into an extraordinary community response.

After initially filling and delivering 200 sandbags through his landscaping business, Ben called on residents and businesses to volunteer. Working alongside emergency services, he coordinated sandbagging, deliveries and flood recovery efforts, using social media to connect those needing assistance with people willing to help. During the first flood, approximately 5,000 sandbags were prepared or distributed. When Tropical Cyclone Narelle threatened further flooding, Ben returned to coordinate another response involving volunteers, emergency services and Defence personnel. A further 18,000 sandbags were prepared, helping protect homes, businesses, schools and critical infrastructure.

Across both emergencies, 800 volunteers contributed to the response, preparing around 23,000 sandbags. Ben's leadership demonstrated the strength of Katherine's community and the extraordinary difference Australians can make through mateship and collective action.

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 TERRITORY'S FINEST

Since 1960, the Australian of the Year Awards have recognised people from across the country and from all fields of endeavour. This is just a snapshot of the recipients from the Northern Territory for the past five years. The full honour roll can be viewed at **australianoftheyear.org.au**

Australian of the Year

2026	Dr Felix Ho ASM OAM – Volunteer paramedic and youth program builder
2025	Grant Ngulmiya Nundhirribala – Musician, role model and cultural leader
2024	Blair McFarland – Founder, Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service
2023	S Bush-Blanasi – In Memoriam – Chair, Northern Land Council
2022	Leanne Liddle – Director of the Aboriginal Justice Unit

Senior Australian of the Year

2026	Jenny Duggan OAM – Environmental warrior
2025	Michael Foley OAM – Community volunteer and founder, Seniors Of Excellence NT
2024	Yalmay Yunupiŋu – Teacher, linguist and community leader
2023	Bernard Tipiloura – Suicide prevention campaigner
2022	Robyne Burridge OAM – Disability services advocate and Founder of Focus-A-Bility

Young Australian of the Year

2026	Jaiden Dickenson – Indigenous community leader
2025	Nilesh Dilushan – Community service leader
2024	Peter Susanto – Medical student and community volunteer
2023	Jahdai Vigona – First Nations community leader
2022	Sizolwenkosi Fuyana – Businesswoman, podcaster and youth advocate

Australia's Local Hero

2026	Ron Green BM ESM – Emergency services and St John Ambulance volunteer
2025	Mignon McHendrie – Wildlife carer and advocate
2024	Witiyana Marika – Musician and filmmaker
2023	Sacha King – Social worker and founder, Two Two One Mental Health Charity
2022	Rebecca Forrest – Event organiser and fundraiser

* 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

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Department of Home Affairs

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Australian National University

EAST HOTEL

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