

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL WEDNESDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2016

**FINALISTS ANNOUNCED FOR 2017 VICTORIAN
AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS**

Human rights advocates, medical specialists, a community fundraiser, a footballer turned Motor Neurone Disease campaigner, veterans' support advocates, a journalist and a lifesaver are among the finalists in the 2017 Victorian Australian of the Year Awards.

The Victorian Award finalists announced today are in the running to be named Victorian Australian of the Year, Victorian Senior Australian of the Year, Victorian Young Australian of the Year and Victorian Local Hero.

The 2017 Victorian Award finalists are:

2017 VICTORIAN AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Waleed Aly – Broadcaster and academic (Melbourne)
Paris Aristotle AM – Anti-torture and refugee advocate (Melbourne)
Neale Daniher AM – Motor Neurone Disease campaigner (Melbourne)
Maryanne Diamond AO – Accessibility activist (Melbourne)

2017 VICTORIAN SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Trisha Dunning AM – Diabetes specialist (Bannockburn)
Sabihe McDonald – Interpreter and community volunteer (Elwood)
Lois Peeler AM – Indigenous educator (Nunawading)
Professor Hugh Taylor AC – Ophthalmologist (Fitzroy)

2017 VICTORIAN YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Jason Ball – Diversity and inclusion champion (South Yarra)
Tarang Chawla – Anti-domestic violence advocate (Moorabbin)
Dr Jessica Dean – Mental and sexual health crusader (Carnegie)
Grant Monks – Kidney health ambassador (Melbourne)

2017 VICTORIAN LOCAL HERO

Chrissie Foster – Child sexual abuse advocate (Oakleigh)
Vicki Jellie – Community fundraiser (Warrnambool)
Simon Lewis – Lifesaver (St Kilda)
Scott and Chris May – Young veteran supporters (Pakenham, Berwick)

The Victorian Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year and Local Hero Award recipients will be announced on Wednesday 16 November at Government House in Melbourne.

The Victorian Award recipients will then join recipients from all other States and Territories as finalists for the national awards, which will be held in Canberra on 25 January 2017.

National Australia Day Council CEO, Mr Chris Kirby, said the Victorian finalists are among 131 great Australians being recognised as State and Territory finalists in the Australian of the Year Awards.

"The Australian of the Year Awards allow us to recognise and celebrate the achievements of outstanding Australians – people from all walks of life making extraordinary contributions to our society," said Mr Kirby.

“The Victorian Award finalists are an extraordinary group of people, committed to improving their communities, industries and the nation. From changing perceptions to saving lives at sea to ending violence and promoting acceptance, they are all true champions.”

Commonwealth Bank has been a major sponsor of the Australian of the Year Awards for 37 years.

“We are proud to support the Australian of the Year Awards, a national program that showcases the Australian spirit,” said Mr Ian Narev, Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth Bank.

“Thank you to all of the State and Territory finalists, who have all made an important contribution to their communities through their achievements.”

ENDS.

Finalist bios attached with this media release or can be viewed from www.australianoftheyear.org.au

Finalist photos can be downloaded from <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B3zfB7dMM-RmOHBqOTVPdGh0eVE>

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards or members of the selection panel visit www.australianoftheyear.org.au or <http://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/news-and-media/selection-panel-members/>

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BIOGRAPHIES

VICTORIA - FINALISTS - AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Waleed Aly

Broadcaster and academic

Forging a reputation as one of Australia's foremost commentators on national and global issues, Waleed Aly is tackling the toughest problems of our time – terrorism, racism and climate change among them. A writer, academic, lawyer, musician and passionate footie fan, Waleed has risen to prominence as the co-host of The Project. His thoughtful analysis of complex and serious issues is balanced with a razor-sharp humour and personal warmth. As a lawyer, Waleed worked pro bono for the Human Rights Law Centre. As a lecturer in politics at Monash University in the Global Terrorism Research Centre, he sheds light on the historical and geopolitical issues that have shaped the current political climate. A regular contributor to national TV, print and radio outlets, Waleed was recognised for his journalistic achievements with a Walkley Award in 2014. As an Australian Muslim, Waleed is a powerful voice, adding dimension to national debate and challenging Australians to think deeply about social and political issues.

Paris Aristotle AM

Anti-torture and refugee advocate

A tireless advocate for refugees and asylum seekers, Paris Aristotle has made an enormous contribution by helping countless people rebuild their lives in Australia after surviving torture and trauma in their countries of origin. In 1988, Paris began building the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, also known as Foundation House. Now leading a team of more than 200 staff, he has helped refugees recover from unspeakable trauma, through a range of mental health, health, advocacy, educational and community services. Paris has worked closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the field of refugee resettlement and has been instrumental in building a national network of torture and trauma services. For almost three decades he has advised both sides of politics on refugee and asylum seeker policy, and multicultural affairs. Currently the Chair of two federal government councils, Paris has demonstrated patience, personal integrity and practical skill as he navigates what is often an ethical and political minefield.

Neale Daniher AM

Motor Neurone Disease campaigner

An AFL legend who played for Essendon in the 1980s and coached Melbourne for a decade, Neale Daniher has become the face of the Australian Motor Neurone Disease community. Diagnosed with MND three years ago, Neale is tackling a disease that slowly attacks the nervous system. Two Australians die from MND every day, and there is currently no treatment, no prevention and no cure. In his role as patron of the Cure for MND Foundation, Neale is using his personal profile to raise community awareness. He's passionately involved with the Foundation's major annual fundraisers – including The Big Freeze held at the MCG each June and Daniher's Drive in October – elevating the profile of MND Australia-wide and raising much needed funds. With great courage, determination and humour, Neale continues to count his blessings, while dedicating the remainder of his life to educating Australians, raising money and seeking out a cure for this silent killer.

Maryanne Diamond AO

Accessibility activist

Fighting for inclusion for most of her life, Maryanne Diamond has recently helped end the book famine for blind people around the world. During her four-year term as President of the World Blind Union, Maryanne led its international campaign to achieve a treaty with the World Intellectual Property Organisation to remove barriers preventing blind people from accessing books. This resulted in the Marrakesh Treaty, a new global copyright agreement that will enable visually impaired people to read books in accessible formats. Despite facing significant opposition, Maryanne remained steadfast in her determination to achieve an outcome that would make a difference to the 285 million blind and vision impaired people around the world. The Treaty is being hailed as the most significant development for blind people since the invention of Braille over 200 years ago. Maryanne's leadership extends to advocacy for disability inclusion, specifically in the United Nations' new 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Maryanne's work is ensuring that people with disability are recognised and valued worldwide.



VICTORIA - FINALISTS - SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Trisha Dunning AM, 69

Diabetes specialist

An expert in palliative and end of life care for people with diabetes, Trisha Dunning draws on her many decades of experience both on the frontline of health services and as a researcher to give people with diabetes the personalised treatment they deserve. As Chair in Nursing and Director of the Centre for Nursing and Allied Health Research at Deakin University and Barwon Health in Geelong, Trisha combines clinical care for people with diabetes with teaching and research. Her specialist skills in diabetes education have led to many board appointments, including five years with the prestigious International Diabetes Federation. Internationally-recognised guidelines have evolved from Trisha's research, while her books, journals, lectures and other publications have served to enlighten many as they work together to address the diabetes epidemic. Caring, compassionate and hardworking, this mother of three and grandmother of eight is still working prodigious hours into her 70th year to better the lives of others.

Sabihe McDonald, 74

Interpreter and community volunteer

Leaving Iran in search of tertiary education while in her 20s, Sabihe McDonald eventually landed in Australia in 1970. Since then, Sabi has been an energetic and vibrant contributor to the Australian community. A Persian Farsi interpreter, she has supported refugees and migrants going above and beyond the call of duty as a chaperone, social worker and friend. She's provided food and childcare, taught English classes and helped people from many countries of origin – from Kuwait to Portugal and Greece to Argentina. Sabi's voluntary work has not been limited to migrants, and she's raised funds for special schools, supported children with parents in prison and started permaculture groups. The doctors of the Royal Children's Hospital continue to demand Sabi's nuanced combination of expert interpreting skills and sensitivity. She also volunteers each week at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, providing succour, friendship and support to many Iranian asylum seekers. With warmth, humour and compassion, Sabi continues to strive for justice and equality for all.

Lois Peeler AM, 72

Indigenous Educator

A member of the Sapphires, Lois Peeler is also a political activist, passionate educator and principal at Australia's only Aboriginal girls' boarding school. Lois has worked in a range of roles in Indigenous affairs and currently chairs the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee. At Worawa Aboriginal College in Victoria's Healesville, Lois welcomes students from some of Australia's most remote regions, many of whom have been exposed to trauma and dysfunction in their young lives. Lois oversees a holistic approach to education that brings together Aboriginal knowledge, values and pedagogy and Western academic leadership. A powerful role model for her students, staff and community, Lois instils pride and confidence in her students, and helps them gain a deep appreciation of their culture, encouraging the celebration of Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing and being. More than a principal, Lois is also an Elder of the Yorta Yorta people, with the abiding responsibility of nurturing Aboriginal culture, history and identity in an education framework.

Professor Hugh Taylor AC, 69

Ophthalmologist

One third of Aboriginal adults report trouble with their vision – and closing the gap on this statistic has become the life's work of internationally-renowned ophthalmologist Hugh Taylor. His long and distinguished clinical and research career saw him work with Fred Hollows in the 1970s and spend 13 years at Johns Hopkins University in the United States. He founded the Centre for Eye Research Australia and has advised the World Health Organization for three decades. The Melbourne Laureate Professor at the University of Melbourne, Hugh is working to eliminate trachoma in Australia's Indigenous communities. Identifying the contributing factors to eye disease, Hugh developed a 42-step roadmap for communities, governments and health professionals. Many Indigenous communities are now trachoma free and Hugh has now turned his attention to other causes of blindness and poor vision in Indigenous communities: cataract, refractive error and diabetes. With sustained effort, Hugh and his team are on track to eliminate treatable eye disease in Indigenous communities within four years.



VICTORIA - FINALISTS - YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Jason Ball

Diversity and inclusion champion

When he came out in 2012, Australian Rules player Jason Ball was surprised by the splash his announcement made, as he was a country player at the time. With no openly gay players at the elite AFL level coming out in the male-dominated team sport, Jason's story captured the media's attention and the public's imagination. While Jason was met with overwhelming support, his personal story shone a light on the prevalence of homophobia in sport. Since then, Jason has marched in Pride March Victoria alongside his teammates from the Yarra Glen Football Club. He kick-started the Pride Cup – an event that celebrates diversity and inclusion in sport and which was the inspiration for the AFL's Pride Game between St Kilda and Sydney. He's trained AFL draftees on inclusive language, and has represented beyondblue and the Safe Schools Coalition Australia, speaking at schools, sporting clubs and conferences about mental health and inclusion. With tremendous courage and conviction, Jason has elevated the conversation about homophobia in sport.

Tarang Chawla

Anti-domestic violence advocate

Following the brutal murder of his sister in 2015, Tarang Chawla has furthered the public understanding of violence against women. In a short time, he's raised awareness of judicial shortcomings, policy failings and cultural attitudes that have led to male violence being a leading cause of death and disability for Australian women under 45. Tarang works with No To Violence, a family violence prevention association, to change men's behaviour and is a board member of the Victorian Government's Victim Survivors' Advisory Council. Displaying a measured and articulate approach to a deeply sensitive issue, Tarang works with businesses, government, educators and the healthcare sector to improve their responses to gendered violence, perpetrator accountability and toxic masculinity. As a lawyer, Tarang contributed to the work of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence. As the founder of Justice for Nikita and ambassador for Our Watch, White Ribbon Safe Steps and InTouch, Tarang shares stories of victims of violence to humanise the people behind the statistics.

Dr Jessica Dean

Mental and sexual health crusader

As a doctor finishing a law degree; Jessica Dean has witnessed close friends and colleagues silently battle mental illness and suicidality in the medical profession. As president of the Australian Medical Students' Association, she took the opportunity to launch a national campaign to target all medical students in Australia. Aiming to decrease stigma, promote preventative measures and empower students to look out for their peers, Jessica and a team of volunteers brought the campaign to all 20 universities housing a medical school around Australia, meeting with medical school deans, university vice-chancellors and politicians – with more than 5,000 students attending events. Jessica caught the attention of beyondblue, the national mental health advocacy group, and now sits on the board of directors, and advisory groups for the Doctors' Mental Health Program and National Suicide Prevention Campaign and Strategy. Also passionate about inclusive sexual health, Jessica established the Nookie Project, which runs sex-positive workshops for doctors, medical students and health professionals on gender, sexuality, relationships and consent.

Grant Monks

Kidney health ambassador

Despite significant health issues and family tragedy, Grant Monks is a beacon of hope for people suffering from chronic illness around Australia. Working for Kidney Health Australia, Grant is also a mentor for multiple chronic illness peer support groups, volunteers his time to support youth offenders and is an ambassador for the Alannah & Madeleine Foundation, so it's hard to believe that Grant has also spent 15 hours each week for 17 years hooked up to a dialysis machine. Grant showed signs of kidney failure when he was a baby. By the time he turned seven, he was on track to receive one of his mother's kidneys when his father, suffering from mental illness, murdered her. Grant's remarkably resilient spirit has helped him through foster care, kidney transplants and many health setbacks. Despite the restrictiveness of dialysis, Grant remains unwaveringly positive. His joy in living and his personal example of life achievements and community contribution motivates others to never give up.



VICTORIA - FINALISTS - AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO

Chrissie Foster

Child sexual abuse advocate

An advocate for children who have suffered at the hands of paedophile priests, Chrissie Foster is the voice and face of thousands of traumatised abuse victims who cannot speak for themselves. After the family's parish priest repeatedly sexually assaulted two of Chrissie's daughters, her eldest, Emma, committed suicide and her middle daughter, Katie, after binge drinking was hit by a drink driver and left disabled. Despite their lives being so tragically ripped apart, Chrissie and her husband Anthony are a formidable force against the might of the Catholic Church. Most recently, this involved fighting for survivors to be allowed in the evidence room to hear the cross examination of Cardinal Pell in Rome. Chrissie's book, *Hell on the Way to Heaven*, made national and international headlines and led to a state inquiry which then triggered Australia's largest Royal Commission. Chrissie's heartbreaking account of her family's suffering, and their determination to stand up for themselves, is testament to the strength of a mother's love.

Vicki Jellie

Community fundraiser

After her husband Peter died of cancer in 2008, Vicki Jellie found his plans for a local cancer fundraising event. His dream had been to bring radiotherapy services to the South West of Victoria. During treatment, Peter spent weeks away from home in Warrnambool, travelling to Melbourne for radiotherapy treatment. Peter's dream became Vicki's passion. In 2009, Vicki brought together local leaders to initiate Peter's Project – a community group dedicated to fighting for better cancer services. Despite being told that a cancer centre in Warrnambool would “never happen”, Vicki relentlessly lobbied governments, rallying the community and raising funds. In May 2014, Vicki announced that the dream had been achieved: \$5 million raised by the local community, \$25 million to be funded by state and federal governments. In July 2016, the new South West Regional Cancer Centre opened, offering radiotherapy treatment for regional patients. Vicki's persistence has proven that ‘nothing is impossible’ and will continue to support “all the Peters” who are facing their own cancer battles.

Simon Lewis

Lifesaver

A lifeguard and Director of Lifesaving at St Kilda Life Saving Club, Simon Lewis is responsible for providing high-quality, yet entirely voluntary services at Melbourne's busiest beach. Lifeguarding is Simon's passion – a passion that has saved many lives. One of his most impressive achievements has been his publicly-funded humanitarian mission with the International Surf Lifesaving Association. In January 2016, Simon was on the ground in Greece to assist with the rescue and recovery of Syrian refugees. During 10 days on the island of Lesbos, Simon helped 500-plus people to safety. He held children and was hugged by parents thankful for his help getting to solid ground. Simon ensured his skills would leave a lasting imprint in Lesbos by training Greek lifeguards and international volunteers in water safety protocols. He built a rapid jetski response team that has since rescued hundreds of refugees. Simon's bravery on the frontline has inspired many people around the world to sign up as lifesavers in their own communities.

Scott and Chris May

Young veteran supporters

After serving multiple tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, brothers Scott and Chris May felt disconnected from their communities when they returned home. Sensing a gulf between their experience and that of Vietnam-era servicemen and women, and with no support services for young veterans existing, Scott and Chris decided to be the change they wanted to see in the world. Establishing Young Veterans, the brothers now help hundreds of young serving and ex-defence members across Australia. They work closely with the RSL and other organisations to support war veterans dealing with depression or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or struggling to fit back into everyday Australian life. Despite holding down full-time jobs and raising young families, the pair devote every spare moment to their mission. They provide a forum to help people share their stories, run outdoor recreational activities and help people reconnect with old mates. Quiet heroes, Scott and Chris are determined to maintain the light in even the darkest places.

