

MEDIA RELEASE
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**2026 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS
NOMINEES FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA ANNOUNCED**

Nominees for the 2026 Australian of the Year Awards for South Australia include a veterans advocate, a storyteller cultivating inclusion and celebrating diversity, a speech pathologist, a conservationist, a beloved cook, the sound designer behind some of Australia's most recognised film soundtracks and an astronaut.

The nominees are:

2026 Australian of the Year for South Australia

Katherine Bennell-Pegg - Astronaut (West Beach)
Paul Broadbridge - Veterans advocate (Keswick)
Professor Marion Eckert - Health researcher (Adelaide)
Dr Mohammad Afzal Mahmood - Public health expert (Newton)

2026 Senior Australian of the Year for South Australia

Malcolm Benoy - Meteorological researcher (Mount Osmond)
James Currie - Sound designer (Carrickalinga)
Rosa Matto - Cookery teacher (Prospect)
Dr David Paton AM - Inspirational conservationist (Gilberton)

2026 Young Australian of the Year for South Australia

Hayley Frazer - Author and storyteller (Adelaide)
Amelia Griffin - Speech pathologist (Adelaide)
Amira Shahin - Humanitarian and educator (Burnside)
Chloe Wyatt-Jasper - Mental health advocate (Gawler South)

2026 Local Hero for South Australia

Linda Fisk and Anna Kemp - Women prisoner supporters (Adelaide)
Callum MacPherson - Mental health podcaster (Greenhill)
Ella Stratton - Palliative care supporter (Adelaide)
Ayesha Fariha Safdar - Community leader (Adelaide)

**see detailed bios on following pages*

The nominees for South Australia are among 134 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The South Australia award recipients will be announced on Friday 14 November 2025 in a ceremony at the National Wine Centre in Adelaide which will also be available to watch online at australianoftheyear.org.au.

They will then join other state and territory recipients as finalists for the national awards announcement on 25 January 2026 in Canberra.

National Australia Day Council CEO Mark Fraser AO CVO congratulated the nominees for the South Australia awards.

"The nominees for the South Australia awards are extraordinary in their respective fields and endeavours," said Mark.

"Humanitarians, advocates for those in need, researchers transforming lives through technology, and those who have devoted their lives to their passions, causes, and art."

ENDS.

Nominee [bios on the following pages](#) and can also be viewed from australianoftheyear.org.au.
Nominees have supplied [photos which can be downloaded](#) from this link: [SA NOMINEE PHOTOS](#)

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2026 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Katherine Bennell-Pegg

Astronaut

Katherine Bennell-Pegg is making history as the first Australian to qualify as an astronaut under Australia's space program, opening pathways for others to follow.

Katherine graduated from Basic Astronaut Training in 2024 as part of a class of six trained by the European Astronaut Centre in Germany – the first international candidate to do so. She was initially chosen for the program from a field of over 22,500 applicants.

Katherine has harboured ambitions of becoming an astronaut since she was a young child. As a space engineer, she has advanced multiple space missions and technologies. Alongside her career achievements, Katherine is an energetic champion for Australia's space program, regularly presenting to audiences of schoolchildren and industry leaders to inspire the next generation and create new opportunities.

Katherine, 40, is a genuine trailblazer in Australia's emerging space industry. With her determination and drive to succeed, she is a powerful example for young Australians.

Paul Broadbridge

Veterans advocate

Paul Broadbridge has made a lasting contribution to Australia's defence and veteran community through his leadership of an organisation that forges meaningful connections between the defence and business sectors.

Paul is the driving force behind Australian Partners of Defence (APOD), founded by his fiancée, Rebecca Waller, who tragically passed away from cancer. Together they envisioned an organisation that supports defence personnel, veterans and their families throughout service life and in their transition to civilian life, ensuring they get the recognition they deserve.

Paul continues this legacy by connecting defence families with the wider community to improve their lives. Today, more than 195,000 members nationwide use APOD to access everyday savings, career opportunities and wellbeing support.

Paul, 47, leads APOD with empathy, dedication and the ability to connect with people from all walks of life, helping individuals while improving the support systems around them.

Professor Marion Eckert

Health researcher

Professor Marion Eckert's groundbreaking research is transforming health outcomes across Australia and driving innovation in nursing and midwifery practice.

Her evidence-based research has delivered major advances in healthcare from online wellbeing tools supporting nurses and midwives, to cutting-edge, pioneering skin cancer detection services in remote regions, led by specially trained nurses using AI.

She led the establishment of the Australasian Nursing and Midwifery Clinical Trials Network in collaboration with other nursing and midwifery leaders, empowering nurse and midwife-led research in Australia and New Zealand. As the inaugural director of the internationally acclaimed, award-winning Rosemary Bryant AO Research Centre, 56-year-old Marion leads one of the world's foremost hubs for evidence-based nursing and midwifery research.

Beyond her research leadership, she is a dedicated mentor to students and clinical researchers alike, and an inspiring advocate for the essential, evolving role of nurses and midwives in shaping the future of healthcare.

Dr Mohammad Afzal Mahmood

Public health expert

Dr Mohammad Afzal Mahmood's work in public health spans more than two decades of service both in Australia and southeast Asia. His expertise has helped transform health service delivery throughout the region, as well as in his local community in Adelaide.

Afzal's active leadership has been hugely influential in improving maternal healthcare in Timor Leste, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Working with local authorities, 63-year-old Afzal has helped to introduce long-lasting changes among healthcare practitioners in developing countries, leading to a decrease in maternal and infant mortality.

In Adelaide, he has long been active in many community programs and cultural organisations, instigating public health programs to promote vaccination uptake, and providing outreach services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In his academic role at the University of Adelaide, Afzal's dedicated support of research students has created a legacy of skilled practitioners willing to take on the challenges of delivering healthcare around the world.

2026 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Malcolm Benoy

Meteorological researcher

Malcolm ‘Mac’ Benoy has made a significant contribution to climate change research in his role as a volunteer citizen scientist, helping to preserve valuable records and data relating to South Australia’s meteorological history.

Over the past two decades, 78-year-old Mac has volunteered with the Bureau of Meteorology in South Australia, where he set up a citizen science group to record and preserve valuable hand-written meteorological records from the 19th century. Under Mac’s astute guidance, the group has digitised over 90,000 synoptic charts and related documents, providing an invaluable research tool for modern-day climatologists.

International climate change and meteorological researchers have used the group’s records to reconstruct historical weather patterns in the southern hemisphere, helping to better understand how the global climate is changing.

Mac’s professionalism, enthusiasm and insight continue to guide the team of citizen scientists in its work to document and preserve critical weather data.

James Currie

Sound designer

James Currie’s filmography reads like a list of South Australia’s most successful films over the past 50 years.

His work as a sound designer, recordist and mixer includes titles such as Breaker Morant, The Lighthorsemen, Bad Boy Bubby, The Tracker, Wolf Creek, Ten Canoes, Red Dog and, most recently, the AACTA award-winning documentary My Name is Gulpilil.

James has worked with many of South Australia’s leading directors over his career and has won multiple awards for his lifetime of work. He has been instrumental in establishing and growing the state’s film industry, particularly as an authority on sound design. His use of location sound, most notably in remote Indigenous communities, has helped create a uniquely Australian soundscape in film.

James, 79, is generous in sharing his expertise and knowledge with other practitioners, especially students, creating an enduring legacy of excellence in sound design now and into the future.

Rosa Matto

Cookery teacher

Rosa Matto is beloved by South Australians, many of whom received their first taste of Italian cuisine through her recipes. She has been a tireless champion for Italian cuisine and culture for over four decades, appearing in print, radio, television and at festivals across the state.

Rosa also champions disadvantaged Australians everywhere, volunteering her time for many organisations including aged care, intellectually challenged adults, and women’s and men’s shelters.

Fifty years ago, Rosa was instrumental in establishing Radio Italiana 531 for the Italian-Australian community and has served in leadership roles across many Italian associations. In 2023, she was awarded the Order of the Star of Italy by the Italian government in recognition of her contribution to Italian culture.

Rosa, 71, continues to engage new generations with her passion, generosity and deep commitment to helping others, using food and cooking to bring people together and build stronger communities.

Dr David Paton AM

Inspirational conservationist

Dr David Paton has dedicated more than four decades to preserving South Australia’s biodiversity and unique ecosystems.

David has motivated many South Australians to take a proactive role in conserving and restoring the environment through his role as an educator and researcher at the University of Adelaide, and through his leadership of several environmental organisations.

With his expertise in biodiversity protection, David co-founded Bio-R, a not-for-profit conservation organisation that has re-established hundreds of hectares of habitat. Bio-R attracts people from all walks of life and ages to its annual planting festivals, engaging thousands of people to make a hands-on contribution towards saving South Australia’s biodiversity.

In all these roles, 72-year-old David exemplifies excellence in conservation research, education and community-driven environmental stewardship, leading by personal example and bringing others along to share his vision.

2026 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Hayley Frazer

Author and storyteller

Hayley Frazer draws on her experience of dyslexia and dysgraphia to produce books and creative experiences that cultivate inclusion and celebrate diversity, encouraging readers and participants to connect and empathise.

Hayley produced her first picture book at 15 years of age, called *Something a Little Different*, which went on to be shortlisted for the Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year and was selected for the Premier's Reading Challenge in South Australia and Victoria. Since then, Hayley has continued to explore neurodiversity-informed literacy and storytelling programs as a way of nurturing self-expression and creativity.

Hayley runs storytime sessions promoting a safe learning environment, and hosts creative workshops for neurodiverse children and adults with all abilities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she produced online resources based on her books to give educators and families access to creative tools.

Through her work and community engagement, 21-year-old Hayley fosters creativity in people of all ages and abilities.

Amelia Griffin

Speech pathologist

Amelia Griffin is dedicated to helping people who experience communication and cognitive challenges to express themselves. Her therapy practice and use of assistive technology is opening new ways to tackle communication disorders that result from conditions such as autism and dementia.

Amelia, 28, is the founder of My Mind Matters Therapy, a speech pathology practice and assistive technology company. Last year, she launched two apps to provide communication assistance to people with speech difficulties, offering a more affordable technology option. Both apps are widely used by speech pathologists, educators and aged care practitioners.

Amelia gives her time to help people with cognitive challenges, offering free therapy sessions to children and adults with dementia, running disability-inclusive soccer programs for children, and facilitating neuro-affirming social clubs for children who struggle with peer relationships. She also collaborates on research projects, mentors students, and volunteers with aged care facilities to support inclusive communication practices.

Amira Shahin

Humanitarian and educator

Amira Shahin is a leader whose work spans mental health, maternal health, and humanitarian service.

Amira is the founder of Mindful Pursuits, an initiative that delivers mental health education to schools and youth groups. She gives regular presentations and facilitates workshops on mental health topics, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Amira also works with the charity Still Aware, which is focused on preventing stillbirths and supporting safer pregnancies through education and community engagement.

As an author, Amira has written three best-selling children's books on autism, emotional resilience, and the experiences of children growing up in conflict zones. True to her values, she donates all proceeds to humanitarian causes, funding projects such as food relief, freshwater wells, orphan support, and medical treatment for vulnerable families.

In all of her roles, 24-year-old Amira displays a selfless commitment to helping others, particularly young people and families affected by dislocation, conflict and cultural marginalisation.

Chloe Wyatt-Jasper

Mental health advocate

Chloe Wyatt-Jasper has applied her lived experience of trauma and mental health challenges to help other people facing similar issues. Chloe experienced a domestic violence family tragedy at a very young age and has lived with profound mental health conditions as a result. In speaking out about these challenges, Chloe hopes to help other people overcome the stigma often associated with mental health.

Chloe, 16, has spoken openly about her own challenges and advocated for greater support for people experiencing mental health issues. Her advocacy led her to be selected to take part in the South Australian Teen Parliament, where she successfully lobbied Premier Peter Malinauskas for \$5 million in funding for improved mental health services for young people.

Chloe also supports Backpacks 4 SA Kids that helps survivors of domestic violence by donating backpacks with essential items such as clothes and toiletries.

2026 LOCAL HERO FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Linda Fisk and Anna Kemp

Women prisoner supporters

Linda Fisk and Anna Kemp established Seeds of Affinity in 2006 to support women exiting prison by providing a place and community where they feel a sense of belonging.

Seeds is peer-led and driven by women affected by the criminal justice system. It helps women to navigate the transition from prison to community and provides advocacy and support to women in prison. Each week Seeds hosts a community lunch where women learn from each other's experience and can access resources such as clothes and food.

Linda and Anna have touched hundreds of women's lives and are tireless advocates for the rights of women in and out of prison. They have contributed to research and written book chapters to educate professionals and the wider community, challenging negative stereotypes.

Importantly, their program creates a community 'feel' that some women have never felt before. This helps women to feel valued and able to develop their self-belief and confidence to go on and live positive lives with their families.

Callum MacPherson

Mental health podcaster

Volunteer creator, 31-year-old Callum MacPherson, is the man behind Young Blood – Men's Mental Health, a video podcast dedicated to the mental health of young men and their loved ones.

Winner of Best Wellbeing Podcast at the 2024 Australian Podcast Awards, Young Blood is a unique offering that's shared more than 250 episodes featuring lived experience stories and expert interviews with guests from across Australia.

When grieving the loss of his mate to suicide in 2019, Callum couldn't find any platforms for young men to share their struggles with each other and the world, so he decided to create one.

What started as a personal mission has evolved through six years of work to become part of a cultural shift in the way we think and talk about men's mental health, driven by the belief that conversations save lives.

Ayesha Fariha Safdar

Community leader

Ayesha Safdar has dedicated herself to helping newly-arrived migrant and refugee women find their place in Australian society.

In 2010, Ayesha founded the Adelaide Pakistani Women's Association (APWA) to create a safe, inclusive space for Pakistani women adjusting to life in Australia. Today, the association works with women from all backgrounds, helping them to navigate their way through a new culture and acquire language skills, education and employment. Ayesha is empowering women to build their confidence and develop the skills they need to create a new life in Australia.

Under her leadership, the APWA runs cultural events, promotes small businesses run by women and creates education pathways for women by connecting them to training in childcare, nursing and community services.

Ayesha's tireless work in empowering women and building bridges between communities has been hugely influential in promoting social inclusion in South Australia and beyond.

Ella Stratton

Palliative care supporter

Ella Stratton understands what it's like for a family to lose a child through illness. She wants to make sure that no family faces such a tragedy alone.

Ella and her husband Jarrod lost their 12-year-old son, Hunter, to a life-limiting illness. In his last years of life, they were supported by palliative care at the Women's and Children's Hospital. In response, Ella and Jarrod set up the Hunter Alfred Stratton (HAS) Foundation to support other families facing terminal illness.

The foundation has raised more than \$1.4 million which is spent directly on families through care support packages, meals and gifts. HAS also contributes to the Women's and Children's Hospital beach house holiday home used by palliative care families, as well as to the TLC for Kids special ambulance transport program they run, which helps children's dreams come true.

Ella's understanding and drive are helping many families survive their darkest moments with support and compassion.