

MEDIA RELEASE
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2026 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS NOMINEES FOR VICTORIA ANNOUNCED

Nominees for the 2026 Australian of the Year Awards for Victoria include sisters bringing children and aged care residents together, a brain cancer research fundraiser, a former ballet dancer turned advocate for people with disabilities, a gardener, a man giving elderly people a safe place to live, a woman saving our wildlife and a geologist who helped rescue workers from a collapsed tunnel.

The nominees are:

2026 Australian of the Year for Victoria

Carrie Bickmore OAM - Brain cancer fundraiser (Melbourne)
Hugh van Cuylenburg - Mental health leader (Alphington)
Professor Arnold Dix - Geologist and disaster rescuer (Monbulk)
Leila Sweeney-McDougall - Farmer's health filmmaker (Tattoon)

2026 Senior Australian of the Year for Victoria

Thi Be Ha OAM - Refugee support volunteer (Glen Waverley)
Uncle Leonard Clarke - Indigenous justice campaigner (Kikkabush Aboriginal Community, Purnim)
Jane Edmanson OAM - Gardening educator (Pahran)
Bryan Lipmann AM - Elderly homeless advocate (Richmond)

2026 Young Australian of the Year for Victoria

Tim Harte - Scientist and disability advocate (Gnarwarre)
Dr Shannon Kilmartin-Lynch - Innovative scientific researcher (Craigieburn)
Abraham Kuol - Mentor and community leader (Narre Warren)
Lucy Skelton - Public policy advocate (Kew)

2026 Local Hero for Victoria

Fiona Glumac and Anna Glumac - Intergenerational childcare pioneers (Mornington)
Carly McKinnis and Tammie Meehan - Rural mental health advocates (Ararat)
Susan Moore - Wildlife rescuer and carer (Tarwin Lower)
Linda Widdup - Farming community organiser (Carlisle River)

*[*see detailed bios on following pages](#)*

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

The Victoria award recipients will be announced on Thursday 6 November 2025 in a ceremony at the Arts Centre Melbourne, 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 said the Victorian nominees reflected the power of an individual to make a positive impact.

"The nominees for the Victorian awards share a sense of passion and purpose," said Mark.

"From lives spent advocating for others, selflessly giving to care for those in need, finding new ways to solve problems or create change, they are all driven by a sense of caring."

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: [VIC Nominee Photos](#)

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2026 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR VICTORIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Carrie Bickmore OAM

Brain cancer fundraiser

Carrie Bickmore is a radio and television presenter who has changed the way that brain cancer research is funded in Australia. Brain cancer kills more Australian children than any other disease, and more people aged under 40 than any other cancer – including Carrie's late husband Greg, who passed away in 2010. Since 2015, Carrie has raised over \$27 million. In 2021, she established The Brain Cancer Centre to bring together the brightest minds in research to find a cure.

The Brain Cancer Centre has leveraged investment by Carrie's Foundation to secure another \$45 million of research funding. This supports research projects across the country and is delivering specific clinical trials for brain cancer patients that are the first of their kind in the world.

Carrie is striving to ensure that every Australian diagnosed with brain cancer can access the best treatments and has real hope of a positive outcome.

Hugh van Cuylenburg

Mental health leader

Hugh van Cuylenburg has worked in education for more than 20 years, but it was a year volunteering at an underprivileged school in the Himalayas that changed his life. Living alongside students who had so little yet showed extraordinary resilience, Hugh discovered the lessons that would shape his work forever.

On returning to Melbourne, he founded The Resilience Project, which now partners with 1,200 schools a year to provide preventative and evidence-based programs to help young people feel happier, improve their mental health and cope better in a challenging time. He has also worked closely with elite sporting teams including the Queensland Maroons, the Matildas, the Australian Cricket Team, the Diamonds, the Australian Olympic Team and over 600 workplaces nationwide.

A best-selling author and co-host of the popular podcast The Imperfects, 45-year-old Hugh shares stories of vulnerability and hope that inspire schools, workplaces and communities to embrace life's challenges with courage and connection.

Professor Arnold Dix

Geologist and disaster rescuer

Professor Arnold Dix became a hero when he helped rescue 41 Indian workers from a tunnel collapse high in the Himalayas.

During the Silkyara Tunnel rescue in 2023, Arnold was the public face of the 17-day operation, declaring to the world from the beginning that the trapped workers would be rescued. Under his expert technical leadership and guidance, the operation switched to a slower, safer excavation technique after machinery failed – a mission-critical decision that prevented further collapse. Arnold's optimistic attitude and calm approach built the confidence that the workers would come out alive.

An international tunnelling expert, Arnold established Underground Works Chambers, offering expert advice on high-risk subterranean infrastructure and safety regulation. Arnold, 61, has worked as a geologist, lawyer and barrister. He's also dabbled as a flower farmer, truck driver and welder.

Arnold never asked for payment for his role in the rescue in India. He showed the world that good people working together can achieve the impossible.

Leila Sweeney-McDougall

Farmer's health filmmaker

Concerned about mental health in her small community, Leila Sweeney-McDougall made a film depicting the pressures that push farmers to suicide, as well as the trauma confronting those left behind.

Natural disasters, cost pressures and farm viability fears place extraordinary pressures on farmers, yet for many, it's hard to talk about their struggles. Tragically, an Australian farmer dies by suicide every 10 days. So, Leila and her husband Sean started a successful non-for-profit organisation 'Live Rural' that hosts a charity event called Mellow in the Yellow to get farmers talking about their mental health.

But 36-year-old Leila was determined to do more. With no previous film experience, she raised \$2 million and wrote, produced and co-starred in a powerful feature film. Since its release in 2024, 'Just a Farmer' has received critical acclaim, national distribution and festival success. Most importantly, it's become a national catalyst for community conversations about mental health, hope and healing.

2026 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR VICTORIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Thi Be Ha OAM

Refugee support volunteer

Arriving in Australia as a refugee from Vietnam in 1979, Be Ha turned the adversity of her journey into a lifelong commitment to help people facing similar challenges. She has dedicated over four decades to supporting refugee and migrant communities in Victoria and is widely regarded as a pioneering leader in community development, refugee settlement and multicultural advocacy.

As co-founder and president of the Springvale Indochinese Mutual Assistance Association (SICMAA), Be has worked tirelessly to support community members of all ages. SICMAA today is a model for migrant community organisations everywhere, delivering vital services to tens of thousands of people.

Be, 75, is a highly respected voice for her community at all levels of government on issues such as cultural inclusion, aged care reform and community health. She continues to volunteer in her senior years with energy and compassion, maintaining a devotion to service that has touched the lives of countless people.

Uncle Leonard Clarke

Indigenous justice campaigner

Uncle Leonard Clarke is a proud Gunditjmara/Kirrae Whurrong elder who has advocated for Indigenous justice, rights and cultural education for over 50 years.

Leonard's influence is both local and international as he engages with courts, police, education systems, governments and international tribunals. As a respected Koori Court elder for 25 years, Leonard strives to make justice systems more culturally responsive and humane for Indigenous communities. Through his position as deputy chair of the Victorian Native Title Services, Leonard played an instrumental role in drafting the Native Title Act in Victoria.

In his traditional country of southwest Victoria, 76-year-old Leonard actively advocates for community development, legal reform, the interests of young people, disability rights and land justice.

In 2021, Leonard founded the Shara Clarke Aboriginal Culture and Education Centre to commemorate his daughter, who suffered violence and injustice. The centre honours her struggle by providing opportunities for young Aboriginal people through education, employment, music and culture to help reduce the incarceration rate.

Jane Edmanson OAM

Gardening educator

With wit and common sense, Jane Edmanson has motivated generations of Australians to go outside and get gardening. Jane believes that connecting with nature through a daily dose of gardening is an antidote to the toxic side effects of our modern lives.

As the only presenter who's been with the ABC's Gardening Australia television program since its inception in 1990, 75-year-old Jane has taught countless Australians how to grow food sustainably, nurture native ecosystems and solve common gardening problems.

Jane has shared her expertise with local gardening clubs, schools and environmental groups by donating thousands of hours to the community and delivering talks across Australia. As the author and co-author of several gardening books, she's also inspired a more environmentally conscious Australia and created networks of gardeners trained in sustainable practices.

Jane is committed to supporting grassroots gardeners and bringing Australia together as a gardening community across all cultures, generations and socio-economic groups.

Bryan Lipmann AM

Elderly homeless advocate

As a young social worker, Bryan Lipmann witnessed first-hand the appalling conditions in which many elderly homeless people were forced to live. Realising that existing aged care homes were not the answer, he founded Wintringham to provide a safe space where the elderly poor and homeless could live with dignity and respect.

Today, Wintringham supports 3,000 people with accommodation and home care services. At its core, the organisation retains the same values that Bryan instilled in the beginning – respect for the individual, social equality and the promise of 'a home until stumps'.

Through his advocacy, 77-year-old Bryan revolutionised ideas about how to support marginalised elderly people in society by creating safe, long-term homes for thousands of people. Bryan's devotion to caring for those who do not fit into mainstream aged care epitomises the difference that one individual can make by improving the quality of life for others.

2026 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR VICTORIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Tim Harte

Scientist and disability advocate

After acquiring multiple disabilities at 19, Tim Harte switched paths from a promising ballet career to champion global disability rights and sustainable energy solutions.

Tim's tireless advocacy includes voluntary positions with environmental, youth affairs and local government bodies as well as disability organisations. Most recently, Tim represented Australia at the United Nations 18th Conference of State Parties.

As a PhD researcher at Deakin University and CSIRO, Tim has developed new sustainable energy storage materials designed to make renewable energy more efficient.

Alongside research work, Tim advocates for greater accessibility in STEM environments to open up research opportunities for people with disabilities. In 2024, Tim co-founded the ChemAbility Network for the Royal Australian Chemical Institute to support members with disabilities.

Tim, 28, exemplifies the power of determination and innovative thinking to turn adversity into an irresistible force for meaningful change.

Dr Shannon Kilmartin-Lynch

Innovative scientific researcher

Dr Shannon Kilmartin-Lynch's work is changing how the scientific community understands the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge in research and innovation. His approach combines scientific rigour with a deep respect for Country in a technical sector where cultural knowledge is often marginalised.

Shannon's work combines civil engineering, materials science, and Aboriginal knowledge systems. This innovative focus has led to some significant breakthroughs, such as his groundbreaking research on Xanthorrhoea resin – a traditional material that he redesigned as a natural crack repair agent in concrete.

Alongside his research, 29-year-old Shannon has pioneered new ways in which scientific projects are carried out in collaboration with traditional owners to preserve cultural knowledge – as well as building new pathways for other Aboriginal engineers and scientists to follow.

Shannon exemplifies how scientific research can be socially responsible by ensuring it aligns with community values and respect for local knowledge.

Abraham Kuol

Mentor and community leader

Abraham Kuol is a respected youth leader who uses his knowledge of the police and justice system in Victoria to help young people in his community.

Day to day, Abraham devotes his time to mentoring and guiding young people, running sports programs and building community ties – all while studying for a PhD in Criminology at Deakin University where his research is having a real-world impact.

Recognising the important role that sport plays in engaging young people, Abraham co-founded the Black Rhinos, a soccer and basketball club to help mentor at-risk youth. He is also a director at Sandown Lions Football Club, where he creates sporting pathways for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Abraham, 28, has helped raise over \$3.5 million for programs to support African-Australian families and justice-involved youth. A quiet achiever, Abraham is nevertheless a popular public speaker, acknowledged for his ability to inspire genuine social change.

Lucy Skelton

Public policy advocate

Lucy Skelton is dedicated to the belief that good public policy can fundamentally improve people's lives.

She first ran for State Parliament aged 20, spurred by the conviction that young voices should be heard in public policy debates. She continues to work in politics, at both a state and federal level, developing major policies to address climate action, mental health, gender equity and youth engagement in democratic processes.

Lucy launched FORE Australia, a non-partisan enterprise to strengthen the link between research, public advocacy and policymaking. From this initiative, she developed the Policy Library of One-Page Briefs' resource showcasing one-page, evidence-based policy solutions that are easily accessible to both policymakers and the general public.

Now 23, Lucy remains deeply connected to her community by mentoring young leaders, especially women, queer youth and people of colour. Her compassionate, clear-eyed approach combines lived experience with a profound understanding of how public policy can impact lives.

2026 LOCAL HERO FOR VICTORIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Fiona Glumac and Anna Glumac

Intergenerational childcare pioneers

Fiona Glumac and Anna Glumac are working to break down barriers between generations and deliver long-lasting health and developmental benefits to young and old.

The sisters co-founded The Herd Intergenerational Learning Centre, Australia's first intergenerational care organisation, that combines an early learning centre under the same roof as a residential aged care facility. The co-location of the two facilities allows young children and elderly residents to meet regularly, enjoying joint activities such as art, gardening, music, exercise and reading.

Fiona and Anna's vision is to enrich the lives of both young and old through interaction and a sense of community. For the residents, the benefits include greater social engagement and physical activity, helping to counteract loneliness and isolation. The children learn empathy and social acceptance of elderly people.

Through their work, Fiona and Anna are helping to bring generations together to build stronger community ties and break down stereotypes about ageing and disability.

Carly McKinnis and Tammie Meehan

Rural mental health advocates

Carly McKinnis, 51, and Tammie Meehan, 48, are driven by their passion to help address the desperate need for mental health support in rural Victoria.

Carly and Tammie established the One Red Tree (ORT) Resource Centre in Ararat to service Western Victoria. The centre exemplifies a collaborative, community-led, grassroots response to urgent mental health needs.

Partnerships fostered over the last three years have provided provisional and early career psychology placements and employment across 27 schools, the ORT clinic, aged care facilities and palliative care at East Grampians Health Services. Graduates from the program have taken up positions in their community and across rural and regional Victoria.

Carly and Tammie's goal is to continue growing the psychology workforce and improving access to localised mental health resources including outreach to farming areas. They are working to build the community's capacity to recognise and respond to mental health needs and provide opportunities for connection and belonging for everyone.

Susan Moore

Wildlife rescuer and carer

Thousands of native animals owe their lives to the compassion, courage and skill of Susan Moore, a dedicated wildlife rescuer and carer.

For two decades, Susan has fed and tended to all types of injured and orphaned wildlife. Her Bass Coast/South Gippsland Wildlife Rescue and Shelter is a safe haven for hundreds of native animals until they can be safely released back into the wild.

At any time of day or night, Susan is often the first person called when somebody encounters an injured animal. Her expertise in treating wildlife, especially koalas, has earned her the respect of local vets. She is a registered carer through Wildlife Victoria's Australian Wildlife Emergency Response and trains other volunteers in wildlife care.

Susan, 64, is a shining example of the positive role that voluntary service plays in rural communities, delivering hope and healing in the face of pain and suffering.

Linda Widdup

Farming community organiser

Linda Widdup is bringing hope to Australian farmers in their time of need, organising deliveries of invaluable feed in response to drought and natural disasters.

Linda founded Aussie Hay Runners in 2019, starting out with just four trucks delivering hay to help farmers feed their livestock. The voluntary organisation now has more than 70 trucks it can call on, clocking up millions of kilometres and delivering over 90,000 bales of fodder to farmers needing a helping hand.

Linda's drive and energy in raising funds, organising volunteers and managing the logistics of trucks and feed deliveries is an outstanding example of community action. The work of the Aussie Hay Runners volunteers not only provides relief for livestock but also raises morale among distressed communities and families.

Through her actions, 60-year-old Linda is helping her fellow Australians get through the tough times on the land.