



2026

STROKE AWARDS



Celebrating our incredible stroke community

The National Stroke Awards celebrate the incredible members of the stroke community, and honour the determination and resilience of survivors, families, allies, health professionals and researchers in helping advance stroke awareness, prevention, treatment and recovery in Australia.

At Stroke Foundation, we are privileged to witness extraordinary acts of dedication from our community every day. These include support for stroke survivors and their families on the recovery journey, outstanding clinical care and research, and advocacy to elevate understanding and awareness of stroke signs and impacts.

Now in their 18th year, the National Stroke Awards serve as a powerful reminder that by working together with our amazing community, we can achieve meaningful change in the lives of all survivors of stroke.

The 2026 National Stroke Awards finalists are a remarkable group of individuals, each showcasing examples of resilience, strength, perseverance, leadership and ingenuity.

Their stories highlight how individuals and communities respond with agility, selflessness and collaboration, often in extremely challenging circumstances. Through innovative awareness campaigns, tenacity in rehabilitation efforts, passionate advocacy, fundraising and clinical excellence – our stroke community champions continue to contribute to improving stroke care across Australia.

We celebrate and congratulate all 2026 National Stroke Awards nominees. Your nomination reflects the invaluable and inspiring contribution you make to stroke prevention and empowering stroke survivors to live well and thrive after stroke.

We thank everyone who nominated the deserving candidates for the 2026 National Stroke Awards. The stories you shared left us in awe of the amazing people in our stroke community, and the many lives their work and actions touch. Our appreciation also goes to the judges who had the difficult task of selecting this year's finalists and winners from such a worthy list of nominees.

We are also grateful for our generous sponsors whose continuing support makes this meaningful celebration possible.

These awards not only celebrate individual excellence and impact, but also highlight the stark reality that every Australian can be affected by stroke. Strokes don't just happen to older adults. Babies and young people experience strokes. Adults of working age have strokes. Stroke doesn't discriminate.

In 2026, Stroke Foundation celebrates 30 years of being the voice of stroke in Australia and transforming stroke prevention, treatment, and recovery. Our organisation has grown through decades of dedicated effort, research breakthroughs, and the courage of survivors of stroke sharing their stories. The unwavering commitment, bravery, and empathy demonstrated by our community reaffirms our commitment to our mission and vision.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'S' and 'M' followed by a horizontal line.

Sarah Matheson AM
President
Stroke Foundation



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L Murphy'.

Dr Lisa Murphy
Chief Executive Officer
Stroke Foundation

Warrior Award

This award recognises the contribution of a person aged under 18 in stroke awareness, fundraising or advocacy. Designating an award for this age-bracket will give our younger stroke community members the opportunity to be recognised.

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Finalists

Harriet Caldwell

Harriet was 13 when her life changed in the blink of an eye. On 4 May 2023 she had a spinal cord stroke and was paralysed from the waist down.

Told she would never walk again, Harriet decided otherwise. After three years of physiotherapy and strength training, she now walks around home, uses crutches at school and needs her day chair only for long distances and travel.

Harriet has played basketball since she was eight. During a three-month stay at the Royal Children's Hospital, her physio introduced her to wheelchair basketball, and she spent the end of every session outside shooting hoops.

Within 18 months she made the Victorian Junior Wheelchair Basketball Team. She is now in her second season with the Victoria Wonders in the Women's National Wheelchair Basketball League, and is on a Paralympic pathway after her first Australian camp at the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS).

Once a quiet kid furthest from the spotlight, Harriet now shares her story with other young people with spinal cord injuries across Australia and beyond, and mentors kids at school holiday come and try days.



Audrey Fletcher

Audrey is 13 years old and believes her disability should never define what she can achieve.

At two and a half Audrey was diagnosed with left hemiplegic cerebral palsy, after a stroke doctors believe happened before or during her birth. Learning to walk, and later to ride a bike, taught her that persistence turns challenges into achievements.

In 2025 Audrey was selected as a school leader, competed at the National Track and Field Championships as a multi-class athlete and won her school's DUX Award. This year she qualified for State Athletics and took part in Stride4Stroke.

Her article for Cerebral Palsy Awareness Month was featured in the Queensland Paediatric Rehabilitation newsletter and inspired other young people to share their stories.

Audrey says: "Awareness leads to understanding, and understanding leads to kindness. I want others impacted by stroke and disability to know that their voice matters and their future is limitless."



Hugh Proud

Hugh survived a stroke at just seven years old while living in remote outback Australia. That event left him temporarily unable to walk, write or use the right side of his body.

Through months of rehabilitation, Hugh relearned these skills and turned his experience into a powerful message of resilience for other young people.

Now living in rural Queensland, Hugh advocates for people with invisible disabilities, especially children in remote communities who face long travel times and limited access to specialist care.

His determination led Hugh to share his story publicly, raising awareness that childhood stroke exists and encouraging others to "never give up".

Overcoming ongoing cognitive fatigue, Hugh went on to become vice school captain, proving that invisible disabilities do not define a person's potential. He hopes his story inspires other young people with disabilities to achieve their dreams.



Courage Award

Recovering from stroke can be an uphill battle. The Courage Award recognises the indomitable courage and hope shown by survivors and carers in facing stroke recovery. This category is open to survivors and carers and celebrates individual recovery and resilience.

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Finalists

Shannon Nelson

Shannon is a survivor of stroke, passionate advocate and speaker who uses her lived experience to inspire others and raise awareness of stroke.

In May 2018, Shannon had a life-threatening left middle cerebral artery stroke. Her husband recognised the F.A.S.T. signs, and thanks to urgent thrombolysis and clot retrieval, Shannon survived and avoided severe disability.

Since then, Shannon has turned her experience into a powerful message of hope, resilience and the importance of acting F.A.S.T.

She is a Stroke Foundation speaker and co-author of *'Finding Yourself After Stroke'*, a world-first compilation of stories from young survivors of stroke around the world.

Shannon is actively involved in stroke research and consumer engagement, sharing her lived experience to help improve stroke care and recovery. Through speaking engagements, community education and fundraising, she continues to advocate for stroke awareness and empower others to live well after stroke.



Ryan Ogden

Before his strokes, Ryan was a physiotherapist, extremely fit and living a life of adventure filled with surfing, kayaking, fishing and mountain bike racing.

At 32, Ryan suffered two strokes caused by a cavernoma in his brainstem, requiring major brain surgery. What followed was a gruelling road of rehabilitation, learning to walk, swallow and even blink again.

Within 12 months he had returned to physiotherapy and surfing, before a third stroke required further major brain surgery. Years of rehabilitation followed, leaving Ryan with lasting physical disabilities.

Today Ryan is a husband and father to two daughters, a physiotherapist at Kieser and a qualified counsellor. His experience inspired him to establish *Reconstructing with Ryan*, a counselling service dedicated to helping other survivors of stroke rebuild their lives.

Ryan says: "Life looks very different from the one I once imagined, but in many ways it is richer and more meaningful than ever."



Richard Wassell

In 1994, while serving aboard a Royal Australian Navy submarine, Richard had a stroke that left him with significant weakness on his right side and no functional use of his right hand. He was 28, and his life changed instantly.

Sport helped rebuild Richard's confidence and prove that disability did not define him. He has since completed marathons and ultramarathons, become a two-time indoor rowing world champion, set multiple world records and represented Australia at the 2017 Invictus Games. Richard also helped secure World Rowing recognition for single-arm indoor rowing as its own category.

Today, while working full time and continuing to row competitively, Richard coaches junior girls' soccer and encourages resilience in young players. He has been married for over 28 years and has four children.

In October 2026, Richard will again represent Australia at an international Invictus Sports Festival event in Perth.



Creative Award

Stroke recovery is a hugely individual journey and for some that is enriched through creative expression in writing, photography, music and fine art. The award is open to survivors of stroke who have a specific creative project to share.

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Finalists

Gillian Coutts

Gillian is a survivor of stroke, speaker, author and one-handed pianist.

After a haemorrhagic stroke in 2022 left her right hand non-functional, Gill tried to return to singing. When that was no longer possible, she found another way back to music, relearning the piano using only her left hand.

With her teacher DJ Ha, himself a one-handed pianist, Gill is now preparing for her Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) Grade 4 examination.

Piano has become far more than rehabilitation for Gill. It is a source of joy, identity and possibility, and proof that recovery is not always about reclaiming who you were, but discovering who you can become.



Roberta Fox

Born into a musical family, Roberta began performing in the family showband as a vocalist and keyboard player from a young age.

She wrote her first song at 15 and caught the songwriting bug, going on to write and record numerous records over the years.

Roberta has played in bands, duos and as a soloist, and has proudly owned The O'Dowd School of Singing for the last 25 years, teaching students of all ages to sing and perform.

In August 2023, Roberta had a stroke that left her with severe aphasia. It never took away her ability to play music and sing. Thanks to the unwavering support of her husband and family, a speech therapist and an incredible community, Roberta has come a long way.

Roberta says that her song '*Don't Give Up*', is for everyone, no matter what battles they face.



Thomas Graham

Thomas is a former public servant and small business owner who lives in Canberra with his wife Bobby and their fox terrier, Bibi.

Thomas survived a stroke in May 2023, which caused a loss of movement in the limbs on the right side of his body. Since then, Thomas has worked to restore his mobility, resilience, psychosocial wellbeing, and return to active independent living.

During his rehabilitation, Thomas wrote '*Let's go for a walk: rebuilding body, mind and spirit after a stroke*', a book about the first 18 months of his life after stroke. It brings together prose, poetry and illustrations by Bobby, who was his principal carer.

Drawing on a poetry and wellbeing program Thomas took part in while recovering in hospital, Thomas now offers creative writing workshops to others. He is a trained StrokeSafe Speaker, has set up a local stroke group in Port Macquarie and enjoys sharing his experience of stroke, resilience and recovery with the public.



First Nations Stroke Excellence Award

This award recognises excellence in stroke prevention, treatment, recovery or research in First Nations communities. The aim of this award is to highlight the impact of individuals and organisations working to achieve health equity within the First Nations sphere.

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Finalists

Associate Professor Angela Dos Santos

Angela is a proud Gumbaynggirr and Kwiamble woman from the NSW mid north coast, and Australia's first Aboriginal neurologist.

Angela graduated in medicine from Western Sydney University in 2011, completing physician and neurology training in 2018, followed by stroke specialty training through a fellowship at the Royal Melbourne Hospital. In 2024, she completed a PhD at the University of Melbourne examining stroke in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Angela is a Senior Clinical Research Fellow with the Australian Stroke Alliance and a Senior Medical Fellow at the University of NSW and Westmead Hospital. She also holds appointments at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, where she works on the Mobile Stroke Unit, and is a stroke neurologist for the Victorian and Queensland Telestroke Networks.

Angela provides outreach neurology services in Alice Springs, Darwin and Moree, bringing specialist stroke care to regional and First Nations communities.



Amy Thompson

Amy is a proud Dunghutti woman from NSW's Mid North Coast. She was 32, working as a midwife when she had a stroke while delivering a baby, going from caring for others to needing care herself overnight.

It changed how she sees stroke awareness in her community, which is one of the highest risk groups for stroke. Amy's dream is for her mob to recognise the signs and get help quickly.

Amy leads Re-imagining F.A.S.T., reshaping the message so it truly connects with her mob. It is about listening, learning and building something together with community, using storytelling, yarning and local language. With Dunghutti artist Kyara Fernando, the team created artwork reflecting symbols and totems people know and feel proud of, now seen across community on shirts, posters and magnets.

Amy also brings community together through the Dunghutti Walk and Run with the Indigenous Marathon Foundation in Kempsey. She believes that every step towards a healthier community matters.



Aunty Coral Toomey

Aunty Coral is a respected Aboriginal Elder, advocate, carer and lived experience leader. Her connection to stroke began in 2010, with the stroke of her late husband, Uncle Bill Toomey.

Rather than facing recovery privately, they shared their experience openly, helping other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people understand stroke, access treatment and navigate recovery.

Their lived experience formed the foundation of *'Written by the Mob for the Mob'*, published in 2016, one of Australia's earliest Aboriginal-led stroke education resources. Built through yarning and community leadership, it won an Agency for Clinical Innovation Rural Health Innovation Award in 2017.

Aunty Coral has since contributed to research and quality improvement work identifying the barriers Aboriginal people face in accessing stroke care.

More than a decade on, she remains a leader in this work, including the *'By the Mob for the Mob'* film project, creating meaningful and enduring change for First Nations communities affected by stroke.



Fundraiser of the Year Award

Stroke Foundation relies on the efforts of its fundraisers and this award is a celebration of the incredible support we receive. There are so many amazing stories out there of fundraisers who go above and beyond to make a difference, and this award acknowledges that commitment and hard work.

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Finalists

Jessica Barton

Jess ran 63.3km at the Gold Coast Marathon, raising more than \$16,300 for Stroke Foundation.

Jess is no stranger to pounding the pavement for a good cause, having raised close to \$18,000 across earlier campaigns, including running 300km through November for Stride4Stroke.

Her fundraising is driven by a determination to raise stroke awareness and to honour her father, Glenn – a survivor of stroke. Glenn had a stroke on New Year's Day in 2020, a challenging time for their regional farming family, who were already battling bushfires while managing the long commute to access health services for his care and recovery.

Jess also established a fundraising round with Kiewa and Mitta, two local football-netball clubs close to the Barton family's heart, where players and supporters wore green armbands to raise awareness and start conversations about stroke.

With every step, Jess celebrates her dad's strength while helping Stroke Foundation support other survivors and their families.



Jack Buckley

Jack lost his mum, Keryn, to stroke in February 2025. She was 58. Since then, he has turned that loss into one of Stroke Foundation's most remarkable community fundraising efforts.

In 2025, Jack created Jacky Boy's 58 for YOU, running 58 half marathons in 58 consecutive days as a symbolic tribute to his mum's age, and raising \$30,159.70.

In June 2026 he went further. Across 58 hours, from Friday 12 June to Sunday 14 June 2026, Jack ran 6.8km loops with only short rests, raising a further \$12,020.72. His mum would have turned 60 just days before, and he carried that with him all weekend. Fatigue forced more rest than he had planned and there were moments he wanted to stop, but people joined him lap after lap and he kept going.

Across both challenges Jack has raised more than \$42,000, and he will represent Stroke Foundation at the 2027 London Marathon. Every kilometre has been a conversation about stroke, and a way of honouring his mum.



Nicole (Nikki) Torrance

Two years ago, Nikki's life changed dramatically when she had a stroke. What followed was a challenging journey of rehabilitation, determination and learning to navigate life in a different way.

Rather than allowing her stroke to define her, Nikki chose to turn the experience into something positive. With the support of her family, friends and rehabilitation team, she has worked tirelessly to rebuild her strength and confidence.

Now Nikki is taking on an extraordinary personal challenge, travelling to Spain to walk part of the iconic Camino de Santiago.

She is not walking just for herself. Nikki is walking to raise awareness, to inspire other survivors of stroke and to raise vital funds for Stroke Foundation. Through numerous fundraising events and an incredible community effort, she has dedicated herself to helping others affected by stroke.

Her journey is one of courage, hope, determination and giving back.



Improving Life After Stroke Award

Our community is full of selfless people willing to dedicate their time to help others. This award celebrates survivors of stroke, carers, and volunteers who have chosen to support their community.

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Finalists

Dr Matthew John Berryman

Matthew is a survivor of stroke, rehabilitation researcher, software developer and advocate, working to ensure lived experience shapes more equitable, person-centred stroke care.

After a moderately severe stroke in 2022 that affected his communication and physical abilities, Matthew returned to Flinders Medical Centre in Adelaide to volunteer on its stroke rehabilitation wards.

He co-designed a multilingual rehabilitation app with Western Health in Victoria, recognised with an award at the ANZSO Conference in September 2026.

A Stroke Foundation *Future Leaders with Lived Experience Grant* recipient, Matthew leads research into artificial intelligence for people with aphasia and contributes to NHMRC-funded virtual reality research on word finding difficulties after stroke.

His British Medical Journal article, '*Recovering from stroke against the clock*', challenged restrictive recovery timeframes and showed that meaningful recovery can continue for years.



Bob Carey-Grieve

Approaching his tenth anniversary as a survivor, Bob has turned adversity into action. What began as running for mental and physical recovery has grown into doing marathons and ultramarathons raising funds, alongside his regular contribution to Stride4Stroke.

As a StrokeSafe Speaker, Bob also shares his story with schools, clubs and community groups, using humour and honesty to make his message memorable.

He founded the Wyndham Young Stroke Network, connecting over 50 survivors through friendship and activities including drumming, tai chi and pottery. Every World Stroke Day, Bob brings health organisations together for Community Health Checks, giving hundreds of vulnerable community members access to vital health checks.

Bob never fails to bring enthusiasm, laughter and positivity to everything he puts his mind to.



Saran Chamberlain

Saran is a survivor of stroke, lived experience researcher, advocate, educator and co-design specialist who is passionate about improving life after stroke.

Since her stroke in 2013, Saran has worked alongside researchers, clinicians and organisations to help ensure stroke research and services reflect what matters to people affected by stroke. She contributes to numerous research projects and advisory groups, and speaks with health professionals, researchers and university students about life after stroke.

Saran sits on the Stroke Foundation Research Advisory Council, the South Australian Stroke Community of Practice and the Australian Stroke Clinical Registry Clinical and Quality Improvement Committee.

She is completing an Honours degree, researching the experiences of people with lived experience of stroke at scientific conferences. Her work is driven by a simple belief: lived experience should not just be included, it should lead and influence change.



Stroke Care Champion Award

This award recognises health professionals and researchers with experience of five or more years, who demonstrate tremendous dedication to their work in the field of stroke. The award acknowledges that outstanding contribution to the lives of stroke patients, survivors and carers is vital and should be commended.

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Finalists

Bronwyn Coulton

Bronwyn is a Nurse Practitioner specialising in stroke and neurovascular care, with more than two decades of experience in stroke nursing and advanced practice.

At Austin Health, she developed the Nurse Practitioner-led Transient Ischaemic Attack Rapid Access (TIARA) Clinic, which for more than a decade has provided rapid specialist assessment and secondary prevention for people with suspected TIA and minor stroke.

She has also championed early Stroke Unit care and expanded specialist nursing roles in hyperacute stroke care.

Her work spans clinical care, education, scholarship and professional leadership, with a particular focus on developing models of care and mentoring advanced practice nurses.

Bronwyn teaches in the Master of Nurse Practitioner program at Monash University, co-chairs the Austin Health Nurse Practitioner Collaborative and contributes to policy work through the Australian College of Nurse Practitioners.



Casey Hair

Casey has dedicated more than 20 years to improving outcomes for people impacted by stroke. She began her nursing career at Box Hill Hospital in 2005, where she developed a passion for acute stroke care.

Returning to regional health care in 2009, Casey became a strong advocate for equitable access to high-quality stroke services for rural and regional communities. Since 2015, she has been the Victorian Stroke Telemedicine Site Coordinator at Grampians Health Ballarat, supporting timely access to specialist stroke expertise across regional Victoria.

In 2025 Casey expanded her leadership responsibilities, job sharing the Ballarat Stroke Coordinator role, while also serving as Grampians Regional Stroke Care Coordinator.

Casey is committed to increasing community awareness of stroke and empowering families to recognise the signs of stroke early.

Through collaboration, education, relationship-building and system improvement, Casey continues to strengthen regional stroke services and improve outcomes for patients, regardless of where they live.



Associate Professor Elizabeth Lynch

Elizabeth (Liz) is a physiotherapist and stroke rehabilitation researcher, committed to building leadership among people with lived experience, and creating opportunities for survivors of stroke to shape research, capacity building, services and policy.

Liz co-chairs the Stroke Living Guidelines Steering Group and leads research programs that advance person-centred, evidence-based rehabilitation, alongside work developing practical solutions to support recovery, adjustment, wellbeing and quality of life after stroke.

A hallmark of Liz's work is her commitment to partnering with survivors of stroke, the people in their support networks, clinicians and community organisations, so that research addresses real-world priorities and leads to meaningful change.

She has contributed to national survivor-led stroke research priorities, stroke-specific educational resources for people with lived experience and researchers, and accessible digital health innovations designed to meet the diverse needs of survivors of stroke.



Volunteer of the Year Award

Volunteers are the backbone of our community, and we are thrilled to be able to recognise their dedicated service. This award celebrates volunteers who make a significant difference and contribution to our mission to prevent, treat and beat stroke.

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Finalists

Stewart Greig

Stewart (Stew) is 46, a father of two, and lives and works in Werribee, Victoria.

In November 2020, Stew had an ischaemic stroke at home in front of his wife and children. Because he had attended a StrokeSafe presentation, he recognised the F.A.S.T. signs straight away and alerted his wife, who called Triple Zero. He received thrombolysis to dissolve the clot and has made a strong recovery.

Stew says: "I felt so compelled to give back, as it was the information that I heard in a StrokeSafe talk that saved my life."

A proud StrokeSafe speaker since 2021, Stew has delivered 35 presentations to workplaces, community groups and organisations across Melbourne, and shared his story through Stroke Foundation's Men's Health Week campaign and on The House of Wellness.

An original member of Stroke Foundation's Consumer Council, Stew has more recently joined the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group, working with senior leadership and First Nations survivors of stroke to progress reconciliation and Closing the Gap.



Christine Heyes

Christine has given more than 16 years of volunteer service to Stroke Foundation as a StrokeSafe Speaker.

Since joining the program in 2010, she has delivered over 120 presentations to community groups, workplaces and organisations, educating thousands of Australians about stroke prevention, recognition, treatment and recovery.

A retired nurse, Christine has still found the training and guidance provided by Stroke Foundation invaluable. She enjoys explaining complex health information in a way that is clear, practical and accessible, helping audiences understand stroke risk factors, recognise the F.A.S.T. signs and act quickly.

Her nursing experience adds a credibility that audiences value. Christine answers questions with knowledge, empathy and professionalism, and her calm approach creates a space where people feel comfortable talking about stroke.

Christine has helped strengthen Stroke Foundation's reach and ensured life-saving stroke awareness messages continue to be shared throughout the community.



Gideon Meltzer

Gideon had a severe stroke eleven years ago while on holiday with his family in Israel. Gideon was a non-smoker, non-drinker and very fit, having participated in competitive triathlons and maintained a healthy diet.

With no prior warning, family history, warning signs or an elevated risk profile, Gideon had a stroke while jogging along the beach. Following a lengthy hospital stay in Israel, Gideon was transferred to Epworth hospital where he remained in rehab for a further two months before attending as an outpatient for a further 18 months.

In 2016 Gideon commenced delivering StrokeSafe presentations to private, charity, corporate and professional organisations.

Formerly a corporate and taxation lawyer for 24 years, Gideon volunteers weekly at Stroke Foundation's office in Melbourne, assisting with legal, compliance and operational matters.



President's Achievement Award

This award is given to exceptional individuals who have made a significant contribution to Stroke Foundation and is selected by Stroke Foundation's President, Sarah Matheson.

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Uncle Joe Miller

Uncle Joe (Ian) Miller is a proud Kooma man living on Kamilaroi Country in Tamworth, and a survivor of five strokes. Since his first stroke in 2014, he has turned that experience into more than a decade of community leadership.

Uncle Joe began volunteering with Stroke Foundation as a StrokeSafe Speaker in 2019 and has since served as an ambassador and Aboriginal advisor. He educates Tamworth and the wider region about stroke prevention, the F.A.S.T. signs and the importance of calling Triple Zero without delay, and gives talks with Rachel Peake, the Stroke Care Coordinator, at Tamworth Hospital.

He has been a member of Stroke Foundation's Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group since its inception in 2021, and contributed his story to *Our Stroke Journey*, our recovery resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. His advocacy for culturally appropriate First Nations F.A.S.T. materials shaped the resources used today.

Uncle Joe has been central to a body of community-led work that has changed how stroke information reaches Aboriginal communities. He wrote the foreword to *Written by the Mob for the Mob*, the first Aboriginal community-led stroke education resource of its kind, and contributed to *Filmed by the Mob for the Mob*, launched during National Stroke Week 2026 in Narrabri, Moree and Tamworth.



With heartfelt thanks to our 2026 National Stroke Awards sponsors

We are deeply grateful to partner with organisations that truly recognise and support the stroke community. Your generosity and commitment make a meaningful difference.

By standing with us, you help shine a light on the impact of stroke, while celebrating the remarkable strength and resilience of survivors, their families and carers.

Your support empowers us to continue raising awareness and educating Australians – work that ultimately saves lives.

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He has also contributed to *Yarning Up After Stroke*, travelling to Canberra to accept its Rural/Remote Health Innovator of the Year Award on behalf of the team and community.

Uncle Joe speaks openly about the hardest parts of stroke, including six months of lost independence and losing his father to stroke at an early age, so that others act sooner and understand that recovery is possible.

His leadership is recognised well beyond Tamworth, including Stroke Foundation's 2025 First Nations Stroke Excellence Award and a Lived Experience Award at the 2026 Australian and New Zealand Stroke Organisation Conference.

In his own words: "I just do things, and I don't do them for anything except for the betterment of the people that I'm trying to help."

That humility, combined with lived experience, cultural knowledge and deep community trust, is what sets Uncle Joe apart. Stroke Foundation is proud to present him with the 2026 President's Achievement Award.

Honorary Life Members

Sharon McGowan AM

Chief Executive Officer of Stroke Foundation from 2016 to 2023, Sharon led the organisation through seven years of transformation, and her impact on Stroke Foundation and the wider stroke sector reaches well beyond Australia.

Sharon's leadership in establishing the Living Guidelines for Stroke Management set a new benchmark for evidence-based clinical practice. The approach was so successful that it went on to inform the development of the world-leading COVID-19 Living Guidelines.

Her vision to invest in the Mobile Stroke Unit reflected a deep commitment to innovation in acute stroke treatment, bringing treatment to patients in the critical minutes after stroke.

Sharon also played a key role in securing the Australian Stroke Alliance \$40 million research grant, one of the most significant investments in stroke research in Australia's history. It is an achievement that speaks to her ability to build the partnerships and coalitions needed to deliver change at scale.

In 2024, Sharon was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for her outstanding service to the stroke community. Stroke Foundation is proud that her work here formed such a significant part of that recognition.



Adrian O'Malley

Over more than 18 years, Adrian has made a profound impact on Stroke Foundation and the broader stroke sector, both in Australia and internationally.

A founding member of the Consumer Council (now Lived Experience Council), Adrian helped establish the participatory governance practices that continue to shape how Stroke Foundation works with people affected by stroke.

As Chair of the Young Stroke Project Lived Experience Working Group, he led Stroke Foundation's first major co-design initiative and shaped our approach to co-design methodology and contribution fees.

Adrian has contributed to EnableMe, the Australian Stroke Living Guidelines and Stroke Foundation's recovery information work since 2013, guided by his belief that access to good information makes a difference to outcomes throughout recovery. His work at the Physical Disability Council of NSW and StrokeLine



facilitated collaboration between the two services to support survivors navigating complex challenges.

He has served as a lived experience expert on multiple stroke research trials, and is an Executive Committee Member and Consumer Engagement Co-Chair of the Stroke Trials Centre for Research Excellence. He presented on co-design at the 2022 World Stroke Congress in Singapore.

Adrian is widely respected for his values-based leadership, grounded in respect, dignity and inclusion.



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