



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

2025 VICTORIAN SENIOR OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Wednesday 22 October 2025

Acknowledgments

The Honourable Ingrid Stitt MP, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, *representing the Premier of Victoria*

Robert Caulfield, President, Council on the Ageing Victoria and Seniors' Rights Victoria

Award recipients

Distinguished guests

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this House stands – the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to Government House today.

In the 1980s, American Anthropologist Kristen Hawkes was working in Tanzania when she noticed something that sparked her curiosity.

Observing the tribe known as the Hadza, Hawkes identified a distinct division of labour between generations.

While younger children could do less arduous foraging tasks for themselves – such as picking berries – they relied on elders in the community to do the more difficult jobs, such as uprooting vegetables.

Once children had a younger sibling, they depended less on their mother for such work and more on their grandmother – with Hawkes finding a correlation between this relationship and the health of the dependent grandchild.

Her observation led to the formation of the ‘grandmother hypothesis’ – the idea that the longevity of humans could be attributed to the pivotal role that grandmothers play in raising offspring.

It is a theory that has been subject to debate over recent decades, but the core observation is clear.

Humans are an anomaly in the animal kingdom.

Along with only a handful of other species, our lifespan extends far beyond our reproductive window.

The ‘grandmother hypothesis’ is one explanation of why this might be the case.

Other examples of this rare longevity include orcas and Asian elephants – notably, species where older animals play an active and important role in supporting the wellbeing of the broader group.

Of course, the contributions of older generations are not limited to grandmothers alone, and they extend far beyond the role of caregiving

Other studies have explored the role of senior figures in sharing knowledge, in mentoring others, and in passing down cultural practices.

How these roles evolved and how they are evolving will keep us searching for explanations.

But – we can just be grateful for the many roles that seniors (whether or not they are grandparents) play in our communities.

Right across our State, senior citizens (often the bedrock of our community volunteers) are donating their time and effort to important causes, building and sustaining communities, and enacting positive change for those around them.

Today's ceremony is testament to the breadth and depth of this work.

So often, the service of our senior citizens is framed through the lens of their support for people of a similar age, or through their work to inspire young people.

But what is equally important is the signal this gives to all those generations in between, who can look ahead and see the opportunities and potential to give back as they age themselves.

As the winner of the 2024 Ageing Well Award, Virginia Mack, said:

"Just because someone is ageing, it doesn't mean that they haven't got any ambition.

Life doesn't stop then. In fact, that's when it can really kick in and get going."

We are lucky that humans have such long lifespans, and fortunate that we live in State with a strong spirit of ageing well.

Congratulations to all nominees here today, and thank you to those who have supported you in your contributions.

You have all contributed to building a more welcoming and connected State – and for that we owe you our gratitude.

I now invite Minister Stitt to address us.