

Order of Australia Honours List Analysis

King's Birthday 2026

ORDER OF AUSTRALIA HONOURS LIST

KING’S BIRTHDAY 2026

1 Introduction

Each year on King’s Birthday, the Governor-General of Australia recognises the outstanding service and contributions of Australians. While some recipients are well known, the majority are unsung heroes whose work strengthens Australian society and contributes to the common good.

This year, 703 Australians were recognised in the General Division of the Order of Australia Honours List. Notably, only 32.7 per cent of recipients are women. The Council for the Order of Australia has publicly acknowledged this gender imbalance. However, what has received far less attention is the lack of cultural diversity within the list.

This document analyses the cultural composition of recipients in the Order of Australia Honours List.

1.1 Methodology

The data for gender diversity is released by the Governor-General's office when the Honours List is released, however there is no data released to verify the cultural diversity of the recipients.

This analysis uses two different ways to measure cultural diversity:

1. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds. This group of individuals include anyone who is from a non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. This definition is quite broad and encompasses many people who are born overseas or ancestral origins. The way this is determined is through analysing the names of the individuals. However, it is recognised, that there are some limitations to this, especially when women and mixed-race children of CALD backgrounds can be missed. As such, some individuals may be mis-categorised.
2. People of Colour (POC). This is a broad term to include non-white individuals, which can include people of indigenous backgrounds, Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American. There are also limitations to this measurement due to people of indigenous backgrounds may not be visibly of colour, which makes it challenging to identify. As such, some individuals may be mis-categorised.

It is important to note that some individuals are included in both measures, an example are those of Asian or Middle Eastern backgrounds.

In this edition, Per Capita first used Claude.ai to compile the list and assess whether individuals are from CALD or POC backgrounds. The data was then reviewed by human editors to ensure accuracy. This combined approach helps minimise omissions while maintaining human oversight to verify findings and prevent misclassification.

2 Cultural diversity in Australia’s population

Australia’s population is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse in the world. The Australian Census captures this diversity through several measures, including country of birth, ancestry, parents’ country of birth, languages spoken at home, and religious affiliation.

Using analysis of data from the 2021 Australian Census, it is estimated that 45.5 per cent of Australia’s population is from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. Within this group, 23 per cent of Australians speak a language other than English at home.¹

Using a separate the people of colour measure, it is estimated that 29.5 per cent of Australians are people of colour.

Given the significant proportion of Australians from culturally diverse backgrounds, it would be reasonable to expect the honours system to reflect this diversity. However, as demonstrated in the following section, this is not the case.

2.1.1 *Order of Australia – King’s Birthday Honours List 2026*

To contextualise the analysis that follows, it is important to understand the structure of the Order of Australia and the distinctions between its categories. Appointments are generally made across four levels, which broadly reflect the scale, impact, and significance of an individual’s contribution:

- Individuals are appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) for eminent achievement and merit of the highest degree in service to Australia or to humanity at large. This is the highest level of appointment.
- Individuals are appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for distinguished service of a high degree to Australia or to humanity at large.
- Individuals are appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for service in a particular locality or field of activity or to a particular group.
- The Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) is awarded for service worthy of particular recognition.

¹.id (informed decisions), [Australia: Ancestry](#), idcommunity demographic resources, accessed 8 June 2026.

On King’s Birthday 2026, there were 703 recipients in the General Division of the Order of Australia:

- 5 individuals were appointed an AC
- 40 individuals were appointed an AO
- 183 individuals were appointed an AM
- 475 individuals received an OAM

Table 1: Cultural Representation in the General Division of the Order of Australia

	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (CALD)	Women (of CALD)	People of Colour (POC)	Women (of POC)
Companion of the Order of Australia (AC)	40.0%	50.0%	20.0%	0%
Officer of the Order of Australia (AO)	25.0%	20.0%	7.5%	66.7%
Member of the Order of Australia (AM)	21.9%	22.5%	6.0%	36.4%
Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM)	17.5%	30.1%	6.7%	31.3%
TOTAL	18.9%	28%	6.7%	34%

3 Analysis

Analysis of the 2026 King’s Birthday Order of Australia Honours List shows that neither measure of cultural diversity—POC nor CALD background—reflects Australia’s population. While an estimated 29.5 per cent of Australians are people of colour, only 6.7 per cent of honours recipients fall into this category. Similarly, although 45.5 per cent of Australians have non–Anglo–Celtic backgrounds, just 19 per cent of recipients are identified as having CALD backgrounds. Even when compared with the 23 per cent of Australians who speak a language other than English at home, this level of representation remains disproportionately low.

This points to a significant underrepresentation of culturally diverse Australians across most categories of the Order of Australia. The exception is the Companion (AC) level, where the small number of recipients means that individual appointments have a disproportionate impact on overall representation. In this Honours List, special congratulations are extended to Professor Terence Tao and Ms Natasha Despoja AO on being awarded the AC.

Notably, people from POC backgrounds remain significantly underrepresented. Only 7.5 per cent are appointed as Officers of the Order of Australia (AO), 6 per cent as Members of the Order of Australia (AM), and just 6.7 per cent receive the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM).

The data indicates that recognition at the national level remains heavily skewed towards those of Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, with contributions from culturally diverse communities less likely to be formally acknowledged.

Gender imbalances are also evident within the honours system, and these disparities deepen when viewed through an intersectional lens. Overall, women make up 33 per cent of recipients. However, representation drops further among culturally diverse groups: only 28 per cent of recipients from CALD backgrounds are women. While women of colour account for a slightly higher share at 34 per cent, this still falls well short of gender parity.

These figures demonstrate that the Honours List does not adequately reflect the diversity of Australia's population, either in terms of cultural background or gender.

Although nominations for the Order of Australia are made by fellow Australians, individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds may face barriers to recognition. These can include limited English proficiency among potential nominators, as well as a lack of awareness of the Honours List and the nomination process. Addressing these is essential to ensure that the Order of Australia honours the full spectrum of achievement and service in contemporary Australia.