



**TRANSPLANT AUSTRALIA
OPENING OF THE 2026 AUSTRALIAN TRANSPLANT GAMES
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
LAUNCESTON, SUNDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2026**

Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to beautiful Launceston and thank you Melissa for the Welcome to Country. Looking forward to seeing you at Mannalargenna Day.

Today, we are not simply opening a sporting event.

We are celebrating something much more profound — the gift of life, the courage to begin again, and the extraordinary generosity that makes a second chance possible.

It is an enormous privilege to welcome you to the 2026 Australian Transplant Games, and to Tasmania for the very first time. For those of us who are lucky enough to be here today, it can be easy to see the athletes gathered before us and simply think: competitors.

But every person standing here has a story. A story of illness and uncertainty. Of waiting and hope. Of families who stood beside them. Of donors and donor families who changed lives forever and as a result had their lives changed forever. And of remarkable determination and personal courage to make the most of a precious second chance. That is what makes these Games so special.

The Australian Transplant Games began in Melbourne in 1988, with just 150 transplant recipients competing in five sports. Since then, they have travelled around Australia every two years, bringing together transplant recipients, living donors, donor families, carers, health professionals and supporters. And now, finally, they are here in Tasmania.

Launceston was due to host the Games in 2020, but those Games were cancelled because of COVID — the only time in their history that the Australian Transplant Games have not been held.

So, it is particularly special to stand here today, six years later, and say welcome to Tasmania. We are so glad you are here.

Over the coming week, competitors from every Australian state and territory, together with our friends from New Zealand, will compete across a wonderful range of sports and activities. But this is not really about medals.

It is about what those medals represent. They represent possibility.

For some competitors, there was a time when illness made sport — perhaps even the simplest physical activity — impossible. Today, they are swimming, running, cycling, bowling, playing tennis and competing alongside people who understand the journey they have travelled.

Their achievements are living proof of what transplantation can make possible.

Recently, we had the privilege of meeting some inspiring Tasmanians who live the transplant journey. We were deeply moved by their stories, and it was perhaps one of the most emotional meetings we've had since I've been in Office.

This cause also has deeply personal connections. Dr Walters is a close friend of Fiona Coote, who in 1984 was the second heart transplant recipient in Australia.

Fiona's extraordinary journey since then is a powerful reminder to all of us of what transplantation means — a chance to live, to grow, to contribute and to dream about the future.

And behind every transplant is another story that we must never forget: the story of a donor, and of a donor family who, in the midst of unimaginable circumstances, made the extraordinary decision to give life to others.

There are currently more than 1,800 Australians waiting for a life-changing transplant. It's important to realise that one donor can transform the lives of ten or more people.

In fact, thanks to the generosity of 557 deceased organ donors, 1,438 Australians received a life-saving organ transplant in 2025.

Tasmania leads the way when it comes to signing up as donors and did you know that in June alone this year, here in Tasmania, six separate donations were made. So, I encourage everyone here today to have a conversation with your family about organ and tissue donation. Talk about your wishes. Make your decision known. Because a conversation today could one day give another family the most precious gift imaginable — more time together.

To all our competitors — congratulations and enjoy every moment. Compete with pride, embrace the friendships you make, and celebrate how far you have come.

To the donor families for your courage and humanity to make what must have been an extraordinarily difficult decision.

To the living donors, carers, health professionals, volunteers and supporters — thank you.

And to everyone visiting Tasmania, I hope you leave with wonderful memories, and with a deeper appreciation of the extraordinary gift of transplantation.

So let us celebrate the athletes, honour the donors, and celebrate the families who never gave up hope.

Above all, let us celebrate life.

May these Games remind us that this is about more than sport — it is about courage, connection, and the greatest gift one person can give another: the gift of life.

May these Games be a celebration of courage, connection and life, and may you all have a wonderful week ahead.

It is my great pleasure to officially declare the 2026 Australian Transplant Games here in Launceston open.