



FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE GRANTS AND AWARDS
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, THURSDAY 15 OCTOBER 2026

Good afternoon, everyone, and a very warm welcome to Government House for the 2026 Florence Nightingale Grants and Awards.

I begin by acknowledging the Palawa people, the First Peoples of lutruwita/Tasmania, and the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet today.

For countless generations, they have cared for this island, its landscapes, waterways and communities and I am so grateful to live here. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and to any Aboriginal people with us today. Your continuing contribution to the cultural, social and spiritual life of our State is deeply valued.

As your Patron for the first time, and as someone who has been part of the nursing profession for many years, I am so very honoured to host this year's announcement of the Florence Nightingale Grants and Awards recipients.

These presentations have been held at Government House for many years, which reflects both the importance of the awards and the deep respect in which nurses are held across our community.

I can speak to that personally. When my appointment as Governor was announced, I was deeply touched by the warmth and generosity of the messages I received from nurses and from the wider community. It was a wonderful reminder of how highly the profession is regarded, and of the vital role nurses and midwives play in Tasmania's health system and in our communities.

I love the close connections we all enjoy here in Tasmania and so many of mine that I have come across in the last few weeks have been nursing related and many go back to the early 90s. One of my new Honorary ADCs is a naval reservist and ICU nurse. Cindy was one of my staff at St Helens back in the day and was also, fittingly, a Florence Nightingale recipient. Don't you just love living here.

Nursing is grounded in compassion, skill, courage and commitment. When I came into office, I said that I wanted lead with kindness, compassion and purpose. Today we celebrate people who embody these qualities so beautifully, and who make a real difference to the lives of others.

Since the 1950s, the Florence Nightingale Grants and Awards have supported Tasmanian nurses and midwives with financial assistance for postgraduate education, research, professional development and leadership.

They encourage excellence in professional practice and carry forward Florence Nightingale's legacy of lifelong learning. It is fitting that applications open each year on International Nurses Day, 12 May, which is also Florence Nightingale's birthday.

Leadership, research and innovation matter enormously. They keep our profession growing, our practice strong, and our care of Tasmanians at its very best. Every nurse and midwife who steps forward to learn, to lead and to ask "how can we do this better?" lifts us all, and that value cannot be overstated.

The Grants have historically been supported by the St John's Hospital Association, together with donations from Tasmanian nurses and members of the broader community. A staggering amount of \$500,000 has now been awarded in study grants to Tasmanian nurses.

I would like to thank the Florence Nightingale Grants and Awards Committee for its longstanding support, hard work and for honouring the legacy of the Returned Sisters and other nursing leaders.

I would also like to take this opportunity to say thank you to Francine Douce, who after 12 years as Tasmania's Chief Nurse and Midwife is leaving the role this week. Francine has been an absolute champion for nursing and midwifery in this State and indeed Australia and the profession is so much stronger because of her contribution. Thank you, Francine.

And now onto our Awards. This year, three awards will be presented.

The first is the **Leonie Sidebottom Study Grant**. Leonie was Tasmania's first Registrar of Nurses, a position she held for 12 years until her retirement in 1963. She played an important role in establishing the State's nursing registration system and in the professional development of nursing in Tasmania.

This year's grant is valued at \$3,000.

The second is the **Nell Espie Study Grant**, which honours Nell Espie's distinguished nursing and military career, culminating in her service as Matron-in-Chief and Director of Army Nursing Services, Australia.

Nell trained in general nursing at the Royal Hobart Hospital, in midwifery at King George V Hospital in Sydney, and in child health with the Tasmanian Department of Health.

She went on to study Nursing Administration and Community Health Nursing at the College of Nursing. In 1951 she joined the Australian Army, and served overseas in Japan, Korea, Malaya and Vietnam.

The Nell Espie Study Grant may be awarded up to \$4,000.

The final award is the **Returned Sisters Memorial Grant**. Offered annually by the Returned Sisters Association of Tasmania Memorial Trust, it is open to registered nurses and midwives who have practised in Tasmania for at least five years.

It enables the recipient to undertake a leadership program or project within Tasmania, interstate or overseas, and may be awarded up to \$10,000, depending on the proposal and financial plan.

To all of today's recipients: congratulations and thank you.

Your dedication to nursing, your commitment to continued learning, and your determination to make a difference are truly commendable.

It is an absolute delight to celebrate your achievements with you here at Government House.

And now, with great pleasure, let us proceed to the presentation of the awards.