

Media Release

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Sonya Smart crowned non-profit Exec of the Year

VMCH is proud to announce that its Chief Executive Officer, Sonya Smart, has been named the top Executive in her field at the 2025 Australian Executive of the Year Awards.

Hosted by The CEO Magazine, the national awards celebrate outstanding leadership and achievement across all sectors, recognising Executives who have made a significant impact on their organisations and the broader community.

Sonya was one of 14 top Executives in the Not-For-Profit category, taking out the prestigious title at a gala event in Melbourne on 12 November.

"I am truly humbled to receive this award," Sonya shared. "To be named Executive of the Year among such an inspiring group of leaders is an extraordinary honour. I am proud to represent the not-for-profit sector and to shine a light on the vital work we do for some of the most vulnerable people in our community."

Since joining the organisation in 2017, VMCH has transformed into a sector leader, launching social enterprises that create meaningful employment for people with disability, expanding its retirement living and affordable homes portfolios, and pioneering new models of care that prioritise dignity and connection.

Under Sonya's guidance, VMCH has grown in capability, scale and impact, with a stronger financial position and broader support for the communities it serves. Sonya has also played a key role in shaping aged care reform as a member of the Aged Care Act Transition Taskforce, and has championed innovation in dementia and palliative care.

VMCH Board Chairman Julien O'Connell AO, who accepted the award on Sonya's behalf, said Sonya's achievements are not just numbers – they represent lives changed, communities strengthened, and a sector inspired to reach higher.

"Sonya is a bold thinker – a disruptor in the best sense of the word – who has never been afraid to take risks when it means creating better outcomes for the people and communities VMCH serves," Mr O'Connell said.

"On a personal note, I've had the privilege of working alongside Sonya for many years. She leads with quiet determination, integrity, and a fierce commitment to purpose. Her humility is matched only by her courage to challenge the status quo.

Sonya brings not just strategic vision and heart to her leadership, but also a quick wit that lifts the spirits of everyone around her. That rare combination is what makes her truly exceptional."

Sonya emphasised the award was not just a reflection of her work, but of the dedication and compassion shown every day by the VMCH community.

"I want to thank the VMCH Board, Executive team, staff, volunteers, and especially the people and families we support. They are the reason I am so passionate about this work, and they inspire me every single day. This recognition belongs to all of us."

Media enquiries

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About Sonya Smart

Prior to joining VMCH, Sonya was CEO of Catholic Homes Incorporated WA for over six years and held leadership roles in residential and community care at Southern Cross Care WA. Sonya holds an MBA, a Masters in Clinical Psychology, a Bachelor of Science, and a Post Graduate Diploma in Psychology. Her entrepreneurship was recognised with a '40under40' award in 2008 for excellence and innovation among Western Australia's young leaders.

About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic, for-purpose organisation, love, joy, hospitality and courage aren't just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we've been around for over a century, we're always moving forward. Always staying true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives; providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and compassionate teams are with you on your life journey; helping you with a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.

