

IN MEMORIAM

21 January 2026

The Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF) is deeply saddened by the death of AIEF Patron Professor The Honourable Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO.

Professor Bashir passed away on 20 January 2026 in Sydney aged 95.

Michelle Penfold, Deputy CEO, Founder and Director of AIEF, paid tribute to Professor Bashir's longstanding support of the Foundation, both during her tenure as NSW Governor, when she served as Patron-in-Chief, and in the years that followed as Patron.

"Professor Bashir was a remarkable Australian whose lifelong commitment to education, reconciliation and the wellbeing of young people leaves an enduring legacy," Ms Penfold said. "Her support for AIEF reflected her deep belief in the power of education to transform lives and strengthen communities."

"Professor Bashir was a much-loved member of the AIEF community and enjoyed opportunities to meet with Indigenous students and alumni and hear their stories. We are profoundly grateful for her generosity of spirit and her unwavering advocacy for opportunity and equity for Indigenous young people. Her legacy will continue to inspire our work and the thousands of young people whose futures she helped shape."

"My lasting memory of her is how she attracted young people around herself, connecting to them, listening to them in a little huddle and how they always walked away with smiles on their faces and warmth in their hearts. I have never met anyone who was so easily liked by others – no one could spend time with her and not feel anything but positive."

Born and raised in the country town of Narrandera, NSW, Professor Bashir graduated from the University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery. She went on to become the first woman appointed NSW Governor, a role she held from 2001 to 2014.

Prior to her appointment as Governor, Professor Bashir worked extensively across children's services, psychiatry, mental health and Indigenous health. In recognition of her outstanding service to children's health, she was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in 1988. In 2014, she was named a Dame of the Order of Australia for her significant contributions to public administration and public life in NSW, and for her work in medicine, mental health, and advocacy for young people, the marginalised and the disadvantaged.

Professor Bashir was married to Sir Nicholas Shehadie AC OBE for 61 years until his death in 2018. She is survived by her three children and six grandchildren.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to her family, friends and all who were touched by her extraordinary life of service.