As Australia continues to battle our biggest-ever health crisis, The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is calling for the Prime Minister to consider a special one-off award to recognise the life-saving work of our nation’s front-line health care workers and public health workers.

Nominations for the 2021 Australian of the Year Awards close this week (Friday 31 July), and each year thousands of worthy individuals are nominated for going above and beyond in their chosen field or pursuits.

PHAA CEO, Terry Slevin, says the events of the past six months have demonstrated the incredibly selfless work of the many thousands of people who have turned up for work every day – putting their own lives on the line in many cases – to help save the lives of so many fellow Australians.

‘It is in times like these that we see the best of people. People who dedicate their lives to the wellbeing of others in these times of terrible distress and tragic loss,’ Mr Slevin said.

‘The majority of our health workforce are not highly-paid. Few seek recognition or reward. They make so many personal sacrifices to keep us safe and well. And in the process, many hundreds have themselves succumbed to COVID-19,’ Mr Slevin said.

‘Our public health workers deserve a significant acknowledgement – the tireless work this year by contact tracers, researchers, epidemiologists, outbreak investigators and policy experts has been invaluable.

‘At a time like this – unprecedented in so many ways – I cannot think of a more deserving way of recognising our nurses, doctors, carers and the many public health workers than for them to receive appropriate recognition via our nation’s most prestigious award program.’

Mr Slevin said the Australian of the Year criteria capture the essence of the magnificent effort right across our nation’s hospitals, public health units, aged care facilities and clinics.

‘Since 1960, our Australian of the Year Awards have honoured those who make a significant contribution to the Australian community and nation; they are inspirational role models; and they demonstrate excellence in their field.

‘In the past these awards have recognised and celebrated the work of our world leading researchers and medicos – including Fiona Stanley (2003), Fiona Wood (2005), Ian Frazer (2006), Patrick McGorry (2010), Alan Mackay-Sim (2017) and James Muecke (2020) – all most-deserving winners.

‘However, this year’s massive collective effort in the war against COVID-19 calls for a collective award.'
‘The PHAA believes there are no more worthy recipients of this major national award than those who baulk at being described as ‘heroes’ during this emergency, yet continue to demonstrate great courage, dedication, compassion and skill in helping get us through this devastating health crisis.’

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