

19 March 2020

The Hon Brad Hazzard MP
NSW Minister for Health & Medical Research
Parliament House
52 Martin Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister

COVID-19 PANDEMIC – RESIDENTIAL APARTMENT BUILDINGS – TRANSIENT OCCUPATION

The Owners Corporation Network of Australia Limited (OCN) is the peak consumer advocate for strata owners and residents. There is an urgent matter that the OCN must bring to your attention.

The Prime Minister has introduced mandatory home quarantine for ALL returning travellers from overseas (midnight 16 March). The Premier is introducing critically important and increasingly restrictive public health measures to slow down the spread of the virus. We support this.

The OCN has learnt that return travellers have started to book “Airbnb apartments” instead of going home to their families.

The ‘home quarantine’ letting business is a very high-risk development. It increases the viral load on apartment owners and tenants. It defeats the public health strategy. It is an abuse of residential communities and it is very dangerous.

There are strict protocols for the management of people in ‘home quarantine’. The licensed regulated serviced apartment sector has strict protocols to protect staff; there is full disclosure from the ‘Guest’; cleaning protocols for various levels of risk (risk of exposure, actually exposed, diagnosed); apartments must be ventilated and left empty for 24 hours; bed linen is sent to bio-hazard cleaning facilities; groceries are left at the door, garbage must be bagged and handled for disposal and so forth. These providers are in separate buildings and not mixed with ordinary residents. If the company is operating in a mixed-use building, it is segregated on different floors and different lifts so that transient occupants do not mix with residents. They often have entirely separate entrance.

None of these protocols and safeguards exist in ordinary residential apartment buildings.

Airbnb apartments are being advertised as “perfect for self-isolation” for return travellers, bringing people who may already be infected into a residential community. It therefore includes accommodation where there is self-check in, a higher number of people than should be permitted for a 2-bedroom apartment, in buildings often with common laundries and other shared facilities. The market has also fragmented with dozens of platforms facilitating transient occupation.

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Genuine residents returning home need assistance. There are already people under home quarantine restrictions because they have been exposed to or diagnosed with COVID-19.

To reduce transmission, more people are working from home and this will increase. We house the elderly and families with children and grandparents. Kids will soon be off school and at home in apartments and communal gardens.

This new development needs your urgent attention.

This is not a matter of extra cleaning or asking amateur Airbnb Hosts to undertake these protocols.

There are buildings in the CBD and elsewhere with dozens of apartments let by different hosts via different platforms dispersed among residents. They have already borne the brunt of uncontrolled illegal access by hundreds of people in and out of their building and have serious concerns.

OCN is calling on you to stop “quarantine letting” in our residential communities.

We ask that you use your extraordinary powers under the *Public Health Act 2010 (NSW)* to prohibit the use of residential apartments for this purpose until the danger has passed. The alternative is that Government enables a Strata Committees of an Owners Corporation to pass a resolution (not by-law) to prohibit this dangerous use for a specified period on public health grounds.

Yours sincerely,

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Cc The Hon Gladys Berejiklian MP, NSW Premier
The Hon Kevin Anderson, Minister for Better Regulation and Innovation