

12 February 2021

NSW Minister for Health
The Hon Brad Hazzard
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

office@minister.hazzard.nsw.gov.au

Dear Minister

COVID-19, HQP & PRIVATE SECURITY GUARD RISKS TO APARTMENT RESIDENTS

Dear Minister

The Owners Corporation Network (OCN) is the independent voice of residential strata communities in NSW. There are over eighty thousand residential strata schemes in NSW housing approximately two million people. In Sydney, high-rise apartment communities are a complex social and physical environment with risks that do not exist in free standing housing.

The quarantine program has been key to protecting the wider community from the life-threatening consequences of the global COVID-19 pandemic. NSW, Victoria, WA and SA have all experienced leaks of the virus into the community. The consequences are severe.

Hotel quarantine is a concentrated high-risk environment. In NSW, the program relies on a casualised workforce, including private security guards, who are permitted to work elsewhere.

It has become evident to OCN that private security guards working in COVID-19 quarantine hotels (HQP) are also working in densely populated high-rise apartment buildings in Sydney. The role of a security guard in an apartment building involves shifts of eight to twelve hours working as concierge, with frequent direct contact with residents and visitors, and patrolling floors and common facilities.

The apartment environment is one of high-density living in close proximity, shared areas and services. The age and quality of buildings vary. Overseas outbreaks of SARS in apartment buildings have been traced to transmission due to defective sewerage, plumbing and air-ducting. Lower income earners, including frontline workers, often live in lower cost accommodation where building quality may also be an issue.

Australia's quarantine program should operate on nationally consistent standards. If HQP is to continue, OCN calls on the NSW Government to follow Victoria and WA and employ a dedicated, well-remunerated quarantine workforce that is not permitted to work in other locations.

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OCN recommends that the Department of Health develop a protocol for communicating with building management and strata residents when their apartment building is exposed to COVID-19.

We are happy to work with the Government to develop that protocol and improve the quality and safety of apartment living. We look forward to discussing these issues with you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K Stiles". The letter "K" is stylized with a loop at the top.

Karen Stiles
Executive Officer