



Strata disaster: How prepared are our apartment communities for emergencies and disasters?



THE INDEPENDENT
VOICE OF STRATA
OWNERS

This report was developed on Aboriginal lands of the Yuin people, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and Dja Dja Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation whose sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects and deep thanks to First Nations elders past and present, and extend this to all First Nations people.

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Apartment living will continue to skyrocket

Over the past 25 years the number of apartments in Australia [increased by 78 per cent](#) to 1.2 million dwellings.

Since 2016 [more apartments](#) have been constructed than standalone houses, making apartments the fastest growing form of property ownership in Australia.

In 20 years townhouses and apartments will [become the majority](#) – more Australians will live in a vertical community as opposed to a horizontal one.

Background

This report provides a snapshot of the readiness of Australia's fast growth apartment sector to respond to climate and non-climate related emergencies and disasters. The insights and findings presented in the report are informed by research and consultation conducted by the Owners Corporation Network between March 2023 – April 2024.

More than 100 individuals from government, government agencies, industry, academia and community were engaged in the study, through ongoing discussions and participation in a stakeholder and expert roundtable. This provided a robust, cross-sectoral and multi-agency perspective of the barriers and challenges experienced by those at the front-line of emergency response and recovery in apartment buildings. In addition, almost 1000 online surveys were completed by residents and owners corporation representatives to establish a baseline of emergency preparedness in apartment communities.

The study identified the fundamental inadequacy of current emergency management and planning frameworks to ensure the safety and protection of the growing proportion of people living in apartments. While further in-depth research may be required in certain areas, it is hoped that stakeholders will begin to address the identified systemic barriers and challenges by acting on the recommendations for policy reform included in this report.

Accompanying this report is a first-of-its-kind emergency planning and disaster preparedness toolkit designed specifically for the apartment sector. The toolkit contains practical ideas and resources to encourage owners corporations to better anticipate, prepare, respond, and recover from emergencies and disasters.

This work has been made possible with the support of a grant from the City of Sydney and financial assistance from Strata Community Association Victoria, Premium Strata and CHU Insurance. We are indebted to the many organisations and individuals (see inside cover) that contributed to the design and execution of the project.

Findings summary

Whether by choice or circumstance, apartment living is becoming the new norm. As more people make the shift to high-rise living it's timely to ask – are our apartment buildings and the people that call them home prepared for the emerging threats and challenges of an uncertain future?

Evidence to date suggests they are overwhelmingly not.

[Over 2.5 million people](#) – more than one in ten Australians – live in an apartment. In our major cities this is closer to one in four and to meet the projected demand for housing this will increase to one in two, or 50% of the population by 2050. Apartment buildings of the future will be larger, more modernised and technologically more complex than ever. A net increase in migration will add further to the cultural diversity of our apartment communities.

In parallel with this growth, the increasing frequency and intensity of severe weather events, changing demographic and societal trends and a legacy of defect-ridden and ageing building stock are changing the risk profile of apartment living. Despite these trends, Australian housing policy remains largely blind to the differences between stand-alone homes and apartments. Practically speaking, this indifference can be seen in the omission of apartment buildings as a distinct category of housing in the Public Health Ordinances during COVID-19. This left apartment communities all over the country scrambling for advice on how to effectively manage the outbreak of the virus in the public-private spaces of their buildings.



The premise of this report is to consider the possible implications of what will happen if we fail to address this blindspot in a future characterised by uncertainty. It also asks, who are the key stakeholders, what are the systemic barriers and what types of interventions are needed to build resilience in our apartment communities.

For the purpose of this study, emergencies and disasters are broadly defined as any event that has the capacity to cause property damage, loss of life or disruptions to the operational continuity of apartment buildings. They may be caused by climate-related, physical, biological, or social hazards. There is overwhelming anecdotal evidence of the potential magnitude of these risks and their unique, and often devastating impacts. The collapse of Champlain Tower South in Miami that killed 98 people and London's Grenfell Tower fire that took the lives of 72 people are poignant examples of all that can wrong when these risks are ignored.

This project is the first step to address the gap in empirical understanding of the barriers and opportunities to emergency preparedness in apartment communities.

"There are fire alarms going off almost every week and it's always a false alarm (eg. someone burnt toast and didn't ventilate the room fast enough), if a serious fire was happening we probably wouldn't take it seriously."

- Apartment resident,
OCN National Survey

1. Ho, Christina & Liu, Edgar & Easthope, Hazel. (2018). Higher density and diversity: apartments are Australia at its most multicultural. The Conversation.

SNAPSHOT OF STRATA EMERGENCIES

Stakeholder complexity

In 2019 cracks were discovered in the basement of [Mascot Towers](#) in Sydney's inner-south. Five years later, the building remained empty while the NSW Building Commissioner continued to lead negotiations between 141 residential and commercial owners, several banks and a third-party buyer group. While stricter regulations have since been introduced, this case stands as a reminder of the complexity of apartment living.

Structural defects

On Christmas Eve 2018, thousands of residents were evacuated when loud cracking sounds were heard inside the newly completed, 392-lot [Opal Tower apartment building](#) located in Sydney.

A one-kilometre evacuation zone was put in place amid fears the building would collapse. Hundreds of residents, family members and pets spent Christmas in temporary emergency accommodation and it would be nine months before most residents could move back in and significantly longer for others.

One of the biggest learnings and hurdles to emerge during the recovery was the inflexibility of normal strata governance procedures to respond to urgent needs. Practically speaking, it took eight weeks and two EGMs before the committee were able to do or spend anything. Speaking to this frustration, Chair Shady Eskander says 'If I had my time again the first thing I would do is pass a motion giving the strata committee authority to act immediately in an emergency'.

Resident vulnerability

In 2022, multiple apartment buildings on the Brisbane River were inundated as rapidly rising flood waters caused extensive damage to key plant and equipment and vehicles located in basement level carparks. In one [Fortitude Valley tower](#), water damaged lifts remained out of action for weeks. Unable to navigate the building's 32 flights of stairs, residents with health and mobility issues were stranded in their apartments.



Fire's burning, fire's burning!

In 2023, a massive fire engulfed the 110-year-old heritage listed [Hat Factory](#) in Surry Hills, Sydney. Remarkably there were no injuries or casualties however hundreds of residents from four adjoining apartment buildings were forced to evacuate during the blaze.

Residents from two of the buildings were able to return relatively quickly however the gas, electricity and water supply to the other two buildings needed to be shut down during the months' long recovery process. More than 100 people were displaced during this time. Adding a further layer of complexity was the fact that almost all of the displaced residents were international students who were provided with temporary emergency accommodation.

Flammable cladding

In 2019, eighty firefighters were deployed to battle a blaze that started when a cigarette butt discarded on a 22nd floor balcony quickly swept up the flammable cladding on the outside of [Neo 2000 building](#) in Melbourne.

There were no injuries or casualties however an inspection found [multiple failures](#) in the building's essential fire safety systems, including a flat battery in the building's fire indicator panel. The Municipal Building Surveyor declared an emergency order which resulted in the total evacuation of the 371-lot building. Residents grabbed what they could thinking they would be back in five minutes. It was almost three weeks until most residents could return.

Similar to the 2014 fire in the nearby Lacrosse building, the investigation that ensued identified overcrowding and the storage of a large amount of household items on balconies as a factor that contributed to a higher fuel load. Smoke alarms in multiple apartments were also found to be disengaged, covered in plastic or disconnected.

Left: Aftermath of Hat Factory fire.
Photo care of City of Sydney

BARRIERS SUMMARY

Emergency preparedness, response and recovery is hindered by underlying sector-wide issues:

- a. There is a very low level of strata literacy in Australia, even in those who live in or own apartments. Many people are buying into these buildings without understanding the complex system they are becoming part of, nor their duties of care and obligations to contribute to the management of the building and the upkeep of the assets
- b. By extension, few people at the coalface of local government and emergency management have sufficient knowledge and understanding of how to effectively engage with apartment communities
- c. Apartment design and accessibility standards are not fit-for-purpose for the needs of an ageing population
- d. Safety is largely compliance-driven and focused on building quality and fire prevention. Other more likely hazards, such as utility outages, water contamination, toxic gases, heat exposure, disease transmission, cyber attacks and security breaches are overlooked
- e. The relationship ecosystem within strata is complex. The combination of both on and off-site stakeholders, coupled with significant resident turnover makes communication challenging. Stakeholders include owner occupiers, renters, landlords, facility managers, strata managers, and real estate agents
- f. Strata legislation across Australia places significant demands on volunteer strata committee members who are tasked with the day-to-day administration of buildings whose assets and running costs are often valued in the millions of dollars. Even with the assistance of a strata managing agent and/or building manager, committee members are often not equipped with the expertise, capabilities, time, or support they need to fulfill their long list of obligations
- g. Financial planning and management can be a challenge for many owners corporations and their committees
- h. There is not a robust, authoritative evidence base about the needs and experience of apartment residents and disaster resilience/climate adaptation

In addition, there are barriers specific to disaster and emergency management:

- h. Apartment buildings and communities lack emergency systems and procedures. Most owners corporations and committees are not actively planning for emergencies or working to build resilience
- i. There are not clearly defined and understood roles and responsibilities regarding emergency planning, response, and recovery or incentivisation to upskill. Individual apartment households are overwhelmingly not well prepared for shocks and stresses and operate on the basis that 'someone else will know what to do'
- j. Inadequate building design and performance standards pose emerging risks for apartment residents which are compounded by governance that limit climate adaptation measures. For example, many apartment communities are vulnerable to heat, and are overly dependent on mechanical cooling. In these buildings, sustained power outages can be extremely dangerous, and for some, life threatening
- k. The diversity of people living in apartments amplifies the challenges and can leave individuals particularly exposed to risks during emergencies and disasters. For example, emergency notifications may not cut through language barriers, and people with physical disabilities or limitations may have difficulty evacuating from buildings
- l. In some buildings, a lack of social connection and cohesion increases communication challenges and leaves residents more exposed to risk during emergencies
- m. Broad scale emergency preparedness campaigns tend to be single issue focused and lack relevancy for people that live in apartments
- n. Poor documentation of strata records can make it hard to identify building stakeholders. This exacerbates communications, emergency management, and recovery challenges
- o. Accessing all areas of an apartment building is a common challenge for emergency services

Failing the heat test

[Research from the University of Melbourne](#)

shows that if a heatwave hit Melbourne and the power blacked out, most residents living in apartment buildings would bake, with indoor temperatures exceeding international health standards.

Some common reasons why the apartment designs failed included:

- > Single glazed windows with poorly insulated frames
- > Lack of insulation generally
- > Poor natural ventilation
- > Aged weather stripping that provided only moderate draft protection



Top: Fire Warden Training.
Above: Metro Village pool.

METRO VILLAGE ROSEBERY

It's not all doom and gloom. Our research revealed some shining examples of apartment communities that are embedding emergency preparedness into practice.

It took first-hand experience and a near-miss for the Metro Village apartment community to realise the inadequacy of their safety and emergency procedures.

What happened?

In 2022, a fire started within the grounds of the 270-lot apartment complex in the inner-city suburb of Rosebery in Sydney. The fire damaged parts of the facade of the building and the door to a high voltage substation. Because the fire was outside, no internal alarms were triggered. Even as embers drifted up towards the apartments, few residents evacuated. The fire brigade were quick to arrive and contained the fire within minutes.

Taking action

Together with a series of prior false alarms that had largely been ignored, the obliviousness of residents to the imminent danger of the fire both alarmed and motivated the committee to overhaul their emergency response plan and procedures.

Over the course of 18-months, and using Australian Standard 3745 2010 Emergency planning for facilities as a guide, the committee:

- > upgraded all of the building's original evacuation signage and diagrams
- > recruited volunteers to participate in fire warden training
- > engaged the expertise of an emergency management consultant to develop an emergency procedures manual and;
- > developed written copy and voice recorded instructions for what to do in the event of three emergency scenarios.

These messages are uploaded to the building's portal and are ready to be sent at the click of a button to every resident on the master contact list.

An annual resident audit is undertaken to ensure contact information is current and the emergency procedures are circulated bi-annually. Metro Village is Australia's first apartment complex to achieve compliance with the Australian Standard.



OPPORTUNITY SUMMARY

It is easy to get overwhelmed by the complexity of emergency management in strata. However, there are opportunities that could lead to healthier, safer apartment living.

- a. Social connection and cohesion in apartment buildings may be stronger than we think. This could be leveraged to improve resilience
- b. State and local government can play a critical role in empowering apartment communities to better govern themselves and develop resident-led emergency response plans through opening up local capacity building funding streams to owners corporations
- c. Apartment communities are hungry for tailored information, tools, and support
- d. Peak industry bodies Strata Community Association and Owners Corporation Network, along with their members, have established communication channels into apartment buildings which could be leveraged to support preparedness
- e. Existing legislation and codes can be used to drive emergency preparedness, climate adaptation retrofits and disaster resilience across the residential apartments sector
- f. Australia has an opportunity to provide international leadership in disaster risk reduction through supporting research at the intersection of apartment living, climate adaptation and disaster resilience.
- g. There are examples of good governance, adaptation projects, and risk management in apartments, that can be used as models to support sector wide improvement

"The single biggest hurdle to emergency or any other planning in our apartment block is the number of toxic relations between some owner-residents."

- Apartment resident,
OCN National Survey

THE ROYAL, NEWCASTLE

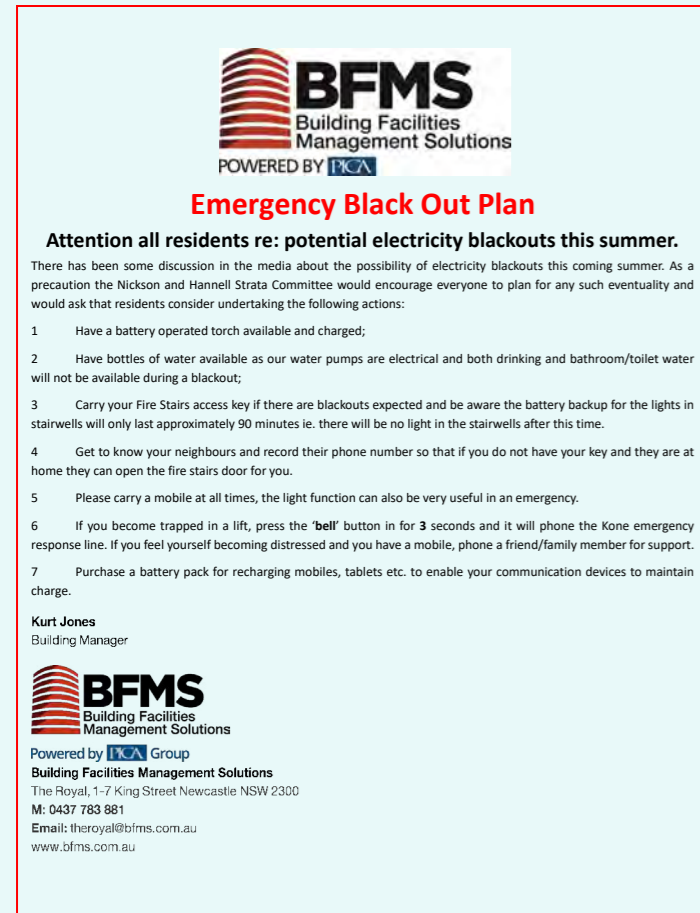
The Royal presents another rare example of preparedness. During the summer of 2023, the proactive strata committee and building manager of The Royal turned their attention to preparing residents for heat waves and the strong likelihood of widespread power outages over the Christmas period.

How did they respond?

An Emergency Black Out Plan was developed and displayed throughout common areas and shared on the resident portal.

With an older resident demographic, heat exposure was recognised as a very real health and safety risk. The Committee considered that if heat combined with a power outage, lifts would no longer run and some residents who are unable to negotiate the fire stairs could be stranded in their homes for days at a time.

They instigated an early warning system which allowed vulnerable residents to prepare in a way that met their needs. This might range from finding an alternative place to stay for the duration of the heatwave or simply to take practical actions like making sure they have torches and powerbanks charged, and ample food.



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Emergency Black Out Plan

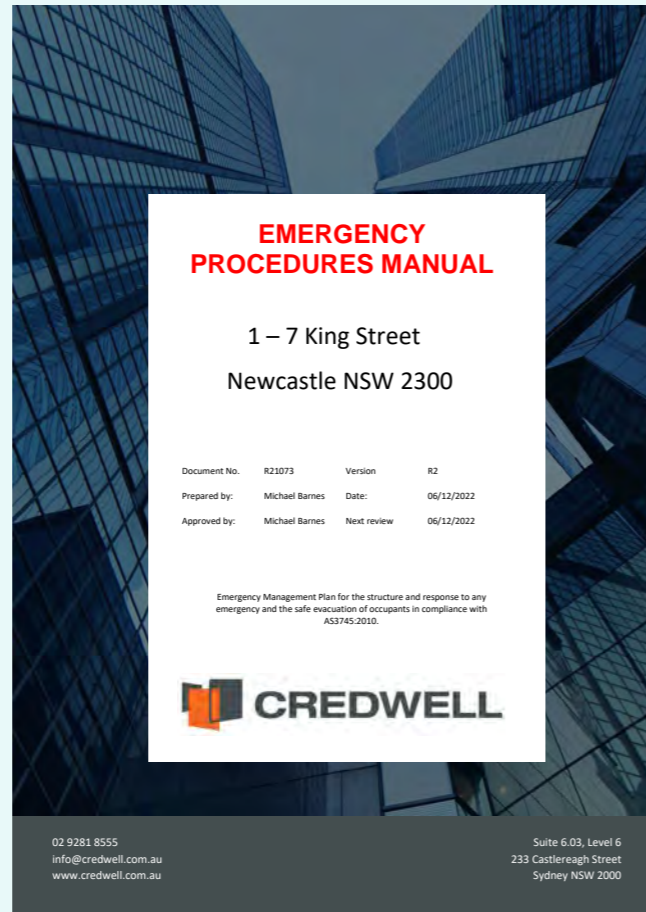
Attention all residents re: potential electricity blackouts this summer.

There has been some discussion in the media about the possibility of electricity blackouts this coming summer. As a precaution the Nickson and Hannell Strata Committee would encourage everyone to plan for any such eventuality and would ask that residents consider undertaking the following actions:

- 1 Have a battery operated torch available and charged;
- 2 Have bottles of water available as our water pumps are electrical and both drinking and bathroom/toilet water will not be available during a blackout;
- 3 Carry your Fire Stairs access key if there are blackouts expected and be aware the battery backup for the lights in stairwells will only last approximately 90 minutes ie. there will be no light in the stairwells after this time.
- 4 Get to know your neighbours and record their phone number so that if you do not have your key and they are at home they can open the fire stairs door for you.
- 5 Please carry a mobile at all times, the light function can also be very useful in an emergency.
- 6 If you become trapped in a lift, press the 'bell' button in for 3 seconds and it will phone the Kone emergency response line. If you feel yourself becoming distressed and you have a mobile, phone a friend/family member for support.
- 7 Purchase a battery pack for recharging mobiles, tablets etc. to enable your communication devices to maintain charge.

Kurt Jones
Building Manager

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EMERGENCY PROCEDURES MANUAL

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Newcastle NSW 2300

Document No.	R21073	Version	R2
Prepared by:	Michael Barnes	Date:	06/12/2022
Approved by:	Michael Barnes	Next review	06/12/2022

Emergency Management Plan for the structure and response to any emergency and the safe evacuation of occupants in compliance with AS3745:2010.

CREDWELL

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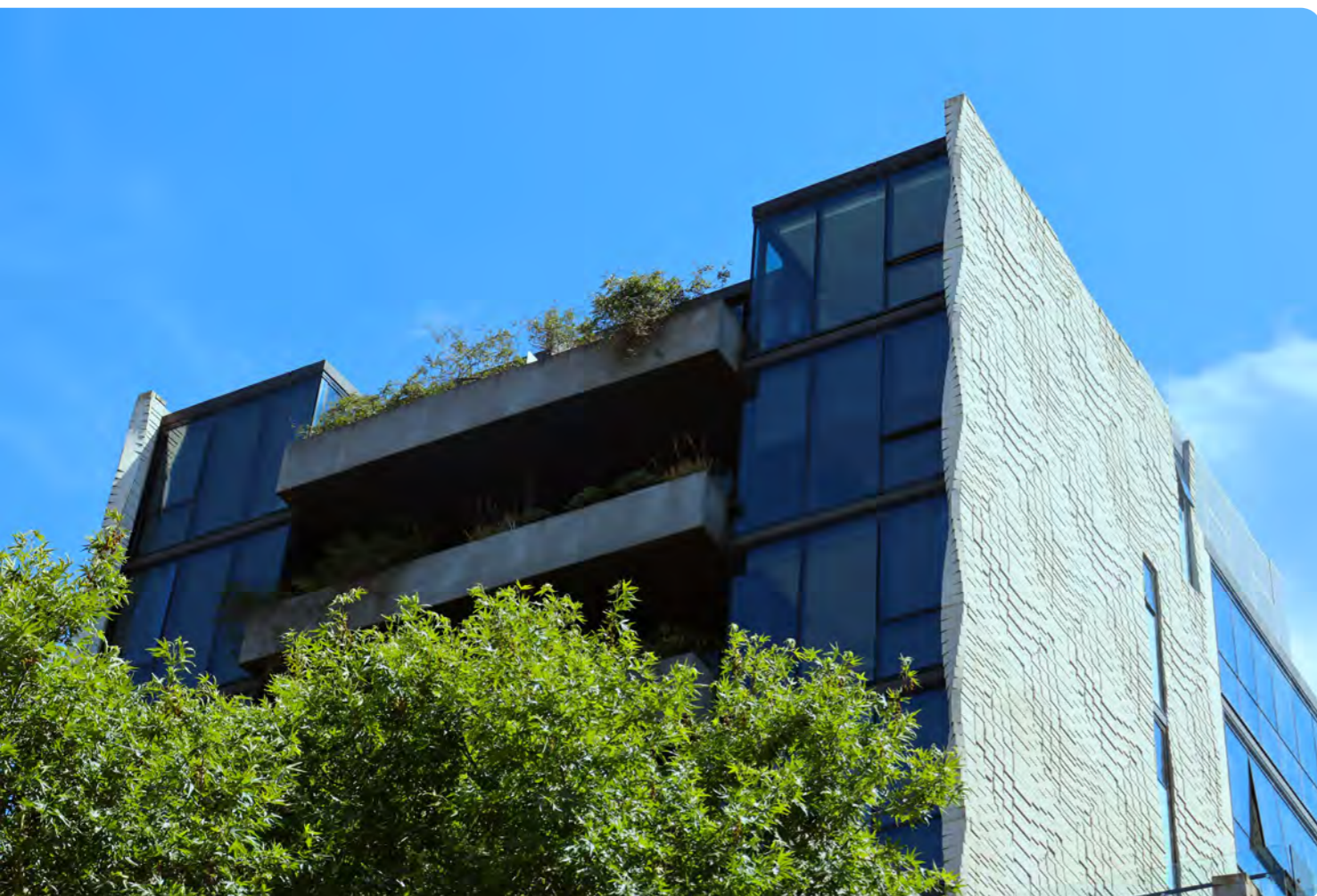
Suite 6.03, Level 6
233 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2000



Policy recommendations for improving the preparedness and resilience of Australia's apartment communities

Policy recommendations have been developed that seek to strengthen the resilience of Australia's apartment communities to better prepare, respond and recover from the increasing frequency and intensity of climate related events and the emerging challenges of urban growth.

The agency specific recommendations call for urgent changes to Commonwealth, State and Territory emergency management and planning frameworks to be more responsive to the safety and protection of the growing proportion of people living in apartment buildings.



The specific policy recommendations have been developed to deliver the following 9 key outcomes:

Outcome	Recommendations
A. Better planning and building standards that ensure buildings are built and maintained to be resilient to disasters and that allow occupants to evacuate in emergencies more easily.	1, 5, 6, 12, 20, 22
B. More comprehensive building manuals provided to owners at the completion of new builds and major renovation, that are kept current.	2, 3, 6, 7
C. Emergency response plans, protocols, and essential information for all apartment buildings are available, kept current, and easily accessible to occupants and emergency responders.	2, 3, 4, 8, 18, 21, 23
D. Contact lists of vulnerable people within each building kept current and easily accessible to emergency responders.	4, 24
E. Owners Corporations and their Strata Committees required to plan for emergencies, consider key risks through appropriate building upgrades and better equipped to manage emergencies when they occur.	4, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23
F. Managers and agents better skilled in emergency management to support Owners Corporations in emergency preparedness and management.	9, 10
G. Comprehensive training and support programs made widely available to upskill Owners Corporations and their managers and agents in emergency planning and preparedness.	9, 11, 14, 18
H. An increase in the capacity of, and more substantial powers provided to Local Government to prepare before and to assist in the effective management of emergencies.	13, 14, 15
I. That all government agencies and organisations that help govern Class 2 apartment residential buildings and their communities collaborate to ensure buildings and their communities are prepared for emergencies and disasters.	5

To the Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers for Planning, Urban development, Climate Change, Emergency Management, Local Government, and the Australian Building Codes Board

1. That nationally recognised, up-to-date and geographically granular climate-risk modelling data be urgently adopted and used to inform Class 2 building land use planning, building codes and standards and climate adaptation and disaster mitigation policy.
2. To review and amend legislation to include provisions for occupancy permits for Class 2 buildings above a certain threshold, location or use, to provide an Emergency Response Plan including Business/Operational Continuity Plan as part of the Building Manual.
3. To investigate and implement an amendment to existing occupancy permits, issued to existing Class 2 buildings above a certain threshold, location or use, to require the development and maintenance of an Emergency Response Plan including Business/Operational Continuity Plan.
4. To consider the role and use of the mandatory Class 2 building Annual Fire Safety Statements, and determine how to leverage or replicate this requirement to include:
 - a. The prominent display at the building site of the location of each of the main isolation devices for essential connections (power, gas, water, chilled water) and any safety considerations associated with isolation and reinstatement; and
 - b. An annual submission to government agents of a register of vulnerable occupiers (elderly, infirm/disabled persons) and their lot number. In NSW this data can be stored in the Strata Hub and be accessible to emergency responders.

"I think there is a lack of duty of care at times... half of us don't know who to contact after hours or in emergency apart from our real estates."

- Apartment resident,
OCN National Survey

To the General Manager, Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB)

5. That the ABCB consider all of the recommendations in line with the organisation's priority work item 'Building resilience'. And, that ABCB seek to raise any recommendation falling outside their remit with the relevant agencies, especially within the Commonwealth government.
6. That the ABCB, through revision of the National Construction Code, consider mandating the following in all Class 2 buildings above a certain threshold, location or use:
 - a. Standard 2012.3 Construction of buildings in flood hazards areas: Section 2.9 Requirements for utilities to mitigate flood related loss or damage;
 - b. Improved accessibility standards and early alert fire systems to enhance the safe egress of occupants in the event of an emergency evacuation;
 - c. Improved thermal efficiency and design standards that anticipate disruptions to the supply of mechanical ventilation and cooling; and
 - d. Model guidance for building manuals to expedite access to accurate and complete building information immediately following an emergency or disaster.
7. That the ABCB, with the co-operation of the Building Ministers, consider undertaking stakeholder consultation and research to identify:
 - a. The feasibility of conditioning the issue of occupancy certificates with the submission of an approved building manual;
 - b. The feasibility of requiring building manuals be kept updated at regular intervals through integration with the ongoing Annual Essential Services Certification process; and
 - c. The feasibility of requiring Class 2 buildings above a certain threshold, size or use to obtain a structural integrity report 20 years post-occupancy.

"Strata Committee refuses to address fire safety, fire stairwells are blocked with garbage bins, nor in unit fire inspections or testing for 20 years"

- Apartment resident,
OCN National Survey

"No one has access to fire door stair keys without paying \$50 each for them, making re-entry near impossible. "

- Apartment resident,
OCN National Survey

"As tenants we don't know who to contact after hours apart from our real estate agent."

- Apartment resident,
OCN National Survey

To the Standards Australia CEO and Chair

8. That the technical committee convened to review Australian Standard 3745 2010 Emergency planning for facilities (pending revision) be asked to consider ways to improve the relevancy of guidance for Class 2 buildings. This would include identifying alternatives to Emergency Control Organisation structures and a decision matrix to determine when to evacuate based on each identified risk.

To the Commonwealth Ministers for Skills and Training and Employment and Workplace Relations

9. That the government recognise the shortage of qualified strata and building/facilities managers across Australia with specific skills in emergency preparedness and response, and:
 - a. Amend the current Certificate IV and Diploma for strata and building/facility managers to include a core unit of competency that addresses emergency preparedness and response in Class 2 buildings; and
 - b. Quickly upskill the strata and building/facility management sector in emergency preparedness and response by re-negotiating the current National Skills Agreement to include fee free TAFE courses.

To the State and Territory Ministers for consumer protection including strata managing agents, building/facility managers and real estate property managers

10. That the consumer protection agencies develop and deliver annually through their approved providers compulsory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) topics that address emergency preparedness in Class 2 buildings.
11. That the consumer protection agencies and other relevant organisations such as the Owners Corporation Network be funded to develop and deliver tailored training and resources to upskill volunteer committee members to lead emergency preparedness and response in their apartment communities.

To the Commonwealth Minister for Treasury

12. That Housing Accord funding to States and Territories is made conditional that Class 2 buildings in their programs be built to withstand projected climate scenarios for 2050 and beyond.

To the Commonwealth Ministers for Emergency Management and the State and Territory Ministers for emergency management

13. To strengthen valuable role that Local Government provides in helping communities respond to and recover from emergencies, through their statutory requirement to support Local Emergency Management Committees through dedicated and resourced Local Emergency Management Officers (LEMOs). Additional funding to be considered through the Financial Assistance Grant.
14. That funding be provided, through the Financial Assistance Grant, to enable Local Government to further support communities within Class 2 buildings in emergency preparation and response. This funding to resource:
 - a. The appointment of an Emergency Management Coordinator to support all Class 2 buildings within the local government area that have an occupancy permit requiring an Emergency Response Plan; and
 - b. The appointment of precinct-based resilience staff to strengthen engagement with, and activation of resident networks within and across Class 2 buildings.
15. That the Emergency Management Coordinator is empowered with statutory functions under circumstances where a failure of critical infrastructure or threat to building integrity is presenting a risk to life in Class 2 buildings to:
 - a. Provide advice on whether the situation should be declared as an emergency as identified by the Emergency Response Plan;
 - b. Provide advice on whether an evacuation or shelter-in-place order should be made;
 - c. Coordinate the post evacuation and safe operational recovery of residents; and
 - d. Appoint an administrator with delegated functions and powers to make decisions on behalf of the owners corporation, facilitate any required administrative processes such as general meetings, enter into make safe agreements and respond to building notices or orders.

"There are fire alarms going off almost every week and it's always a false alarm (eg. someone burnt toast and didn't ventilate the room fast enough), if a serious fire was happening we probably wouldn't take it seriously."

- Apartment resident,
OCN National Survey

To the Commonwealth and State and Territory Ministers for Emergency Management

16. That funding be allocated to review the eligibility criteria of current Disaster Assistance packages to ensure residents living in Class 2 buildings are not excluded from accessing emergency accommodation and other forms of support currently available to residents living in stand-alone dwellings.
17. That disaster research and household resilience programs delivered via Commonwealth funding afford greater priority to the needs of residents living in Class 2 buildings.

To the State and Territory Ministers for consumer protection

18. To empower owners corporations to prepare for disasters and emergencies, including to:
 - a. Develop and maintain Emergency Response Plans; and
 - b. Build community resilience and emergency preparedness through information and skill sharing opportunities; and
 - c. Implement climate adaptation retrofits and early warning systems, including actions such as installing tinted windows, flyscreens on windows and external heat reflecting louvres and blinds.
19. Review and amend strata legislation to establish an emergency status designation that would invoke a change in governance arrangements (possibly through a bylaw) to respond to emergency situations. This should include the ability for the Strata Committee to invoke emergency powers and immediately access limited funding.
20. Review and amend strata legislation to require capital works plans consider climate risks and adaptation measures.
21. Require owners corporations to provide a copy of any emergency response plan and protocol to all owners and residents at the point of sale and lease of apartment units. In NSW the Minister to consider using the Strata Hub to share this information.
22. Ensure that tenants and owner occupiers share the same minimum standards and obligations for energy efficiency, thermal comfort and fire safety for their units. This may require changes to strata legislation and residential tenancy legislation to harmonise standards.
23. Review and amend the strata legislation and State Emergency Management Acts to require an authorised building contact to be registered annually with the first responder databases. The registered building contact to then receive direct notification of local hazards and utility outages such that they can assist in the communication protocol with Class 2 building occupiers.
24. Review and amend the strata legislation to require the registration of certain occupiers demographics (elderly/ infirm/disabled persons) and that this register of vulnerable occupiers forms part of the annual report submitted to the State or Territory regulator. In NSW the Minister to consider using the Strata Hub to register this information.

"We live in a suburb entirely of apartment complexes. There is no practice or strategy for cross-building evacuations. If one tower went up in smoke another would be close behind. "

- Apartment resident, OCN National Survey



Project findings

A huge amount of data was collected during the project which is synthesized in the Appendices. This section provides an evidence-based to support the most salient findings that drove the identification of barriers and opportunities.

Findings have been drawn from three sources: the national survey, Stakeholder Roundtable and industry engagement, and the desktop review. Each source is identified as follows:

- National survey
- Stakeholder Roundtable and industry engagement
- Desktop review

EVIDENCE FOR THE BARRIERS TO EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN APARTMENT COMMUNITIES

a. There is a very low level of strata literacy in Australia, even in those who live in or own apartments

- Very low level of strata literacy across the board in Australia.
- Even people who live or own in an apartment building have low levels of strata literacy.
- Anecdotally and empirically, there is evidence that few people who buy into apartment living are fully aware of their responsibilities as joint owners of common property, or of their rights and obligations with regards to the governance of their schemes. [The fourth tier of governance: Managing the future of our cities](#) paper from City Futures Research Centre, University of NSW, stated when talking about reasons for under-collection of repair and maintenance levies "The first is an apparent lack of knowledge on the part of some owners of their responsibilities as joint owners of common property."
- The [Unlocking Sustainable Strata Report](#) (2022) identified "Lack of confidence in navigating the necessary governance and decision-making processes" and "Owners not being aware of their automatic role and obligations as a member of the owners corporation" as barriers to making building improvements.



"We have 2 owners who are elderly, profoundly deaf and one of which has a cognitive impairment. They are ignored when it comes to communication, and strata committee does not accommodate their needs. They also refused to put in a visual smoke alarm so if there is an incident in the building, they would be alerted due the light flashing."

- Apartment resident,
OCN National Survey

Project findings

b. By extension, few people at the coalface of local government and emergency management have sufficient knowledge and understanding of how to effectively engage with apartment communities

- There are low levels of strata literacy in government and community service agencies that intersect with apartment communities. This is associated with an Australia-wide blind-spot where "residential" is typically used as a shorthand for standalone homes, and the unique circumstances of strata are overlooked.

c. Apartment design and accessibility are not fit-for-purpose for the needs of an ageing population

- According to the Australian Government [Intergenerational Report 2023](#) the number of Australians aged 65 and over will more than double and the number aged 85 and over will more than triple the next 40 years. The number of centenarians is expected to increase six-fold.
- State and Territory Apartment housing design guidelines such as [Planning Victoria Better Apartments Design Standards](#), and [Planning NSW Apartment Design Guidelines](#) do consider accessibility. However, they have not gone far enough to keep pace with the growing needs of an ageing population, nor do they sufficiently address egress and evacuation in the context of high-rise apartments.
- The 2022 [National Construction Code](#) (NCC) update included enhanced fire safety requirements for childcare centres and primary schools located in multi-storey buildings. This update signals identification of a risk and the need to mitigate. Similar treatment is needed to accommodate and protect all vulnerable people in apartment buildings.

d. Safety is largely compliance-driven and focused on building quality and fire prevention. Other more likely hazards, such as utility outages, water contamination, toxic gases, heat exposure, disease transmission, cyber attacks and security breaches are overlooked.

- When asked about risks, residents overwhelmingly focused on fire, largely missing other shocks and stressors that are less extreme in scale but far more frequent in occurrence such as power outages, flooding, burst water pipes, water contamination, HVAC failure, lift break-downs, toxic smoke, security breaches, violence and vandalism.
- While awareness about fire has increased, issues such as heatwaves and power outages are overlooked.
- Many apartment occupiers are not aware of the risks / issues they and their community faces.
- The [AS 3745 Emergency planning for facilities](#), while helpful, is not fit for purpose for apartment living and only one apartment building in Australia is compliant

e. The relationship ecosystem within strata is complex. The combination of both on and off-site stakeholders, coupled with significant resident turnover makes communication challenging. Stakeholders include owner occupiers, renters, landlords, facility managers, strata managers, and real estate agents

Timely communication to all residents and owners is a huge challenge

- Only 52% of buildings have a master contact list that could be used to immediately alert residents to an emergency.
- Only 16% of buildings have an emergency communication protocol.
- Only 14% maintain a register of vulnerable residents and pets.
- Practices of overcrowding, sub-letting and short-term letting make it near impossible to maintain an up to date contact list.
- It is near impossible to communicate with all apartment owners and renters due to language and technology barriers, and because landlords often do not live on-site.
- Where emergency protocols do exist in an apartment building, they are often not communicated clearly, are not understood by occupants, or simply not in the awareness of those living on site.

"Building is overcrowded. There's no way we would all get out safely."

- Apartment resident,
OCN National Survey

f. Strata legislation across Australia places significant demands on volunteer strata committee members who are tasked with the day-to-day administration of buildings whose assets and running costs are often valued in the millions of dollars. Even with the assistance of a strata managing agent and/or building manager, committee members are often not equipped with the expertise, capabilities, time or support they need to fulfill their long list of obligations

- 56% say their committee lacks the skills and knowledge to develop an Emergency Response Plan.
- 53% report disengaged committee members and owners as a key barrier.
- Many respondents agreed with the importance of having a plan, but it lacked the urgency compared to more pressing priorities, it was viewed as 'nice to have'.

I think strata committees often struggle to deal with the range of responsibilities particularly when most don't have the skills or experience to do so. Understanding risks around emergencies and how to address these risk is just another responsibility that committees will struggle with.

- Overworked and under-resourced volunteer owners corporation committees.
- A lack of relevant, tailored programs, templates, and educational materials for the apartment context.
- Owners corporation committees have a huge remit. Emergency preparedness and resilience are just one more thing they need to do in a context where they're already overworked.
- Most committees are essentially volunteer run. They are unlikely to have the expertise required to plan for emergencies.
- The time critical nature of emergencies is in conflict with statutory decision-making processes. Legal authority for strata committees to act is based on management statements and by-laws that were never intended to protect residents during an emergency. This can cause costly delays and exacerbate the emotions of residents who are already distressed.
- In a 2023 ABC article, Executive Director of the Owners Corporation Network Karen Stiles stated "there needs to be education [and] some training for committee members. If they're going to be managing a multimillion-dollar asset, they need to have a modicum of ability to do that."

g. Financial planning and management is a challenge for owners corporations and committees

Some owners corporations are feeling the pressure of rising costs

- 20% of buildings have experienced an increase in the late payment of levies in the last two years. One respondent reported they had introduced an 'early payment incentive which has resulted in '100% of owners paying on time for the first time in six years'.
- 25% have insufficient funds to fulfill their scheduled capital works program for the next two years and have, or are about to, raise a special levy.
- Investment in resilience and emergency preparedness are in direct competition with a large list of other potential priorities.
- Decision making is complex in strata - making it harder to invest in solutions around mitigation or adaptation to climate impacts.

Insurance costs are increasing and there is uncertainty related to making claims

- 95% of buildings report the cost of common property strata insurance has increased in the last two years. The median increase was 23% and the average 30%.
- 25% of buildings have experienced problems accessing or renewing their insurance in the last two years.
- Many respondents reported a hesitance to submit claims.
- Many owners corporations, committees, and residents are not confident about their insurance coverage and claims processes.

"I think strata committees often struggle to deal with the range of responsibilities particularly when most don't have the skills or experience to do so. Understanding risks around emergencies and how to address these risk is just another responsibility that committees will struggle with."

- Apartment resident, OCN National Survey

"It took two general meetings and eight weeks for our committee to get authority to act through formal processes. In this time we could not make any decisions relating to expenditure. If I had my time again the first thing I would do is pass a motion giving the committee authority to act immediately in an emergency."

- Chair, Opal Towers

h. There is not a robust, authoritative evidence base about the needs and experience of apartment residents and disaster resilience/climate adaptation

- A desktop review of research funded through Natural Hazards Research Australia, Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience and academic institutions shows little to no focus specifically on apartments.
- Only two relevant research papers were uncovered, both of which are more than 10 years old:
 - Griffith University's [Adapting strata and community title buildings for climate change](#) paper from 2013. Notably none of the [24 recommendations](#) has been advanced in the ten years since it was published.
 - Living through extreme weather events and natural disasters: [How resilient are our high-rise high-density typologies?](#) (2012).

i. Apartment buildings and communities lack emergency systems and procedures. Most owners corporations and committees are not actively planning for emergencies or working to build resilience

- 84% of buildings do not have an Emergency Response or Crisis Management Plan.
- 40% of respondents rate the ability of their committee to respond to an emergency or disaster as 'very unconfident' (25%) or 'not confident' (15%).
- Only 23% of buildings have ready access to operating manuals and warranties for key plant and equipment. Access to other important building documentation such as site plans, electrical line diagrams engineers drawings is also lacking. 42% have fibre-to-the-curb telecommunication which is more reliable in severe weather events.
- 35% of buildings have a SUMP pump to prevent flooding and 12% have a generator for a back-up supply of energy. 2% have battery storage.
- Only a minority of buildings provide opportunities for residents to take part in drills and training - fire safety drills (13%), defibrillator training (14%), first aid training (9%), or fire warden training (6%).
- The frequency of false alarms is having a detrimental effect on residents' sense of urgency and willingness to evacuate.

"It used to be fantastic, but the current committee are secretive and don't communicate about anything - only just meet minimum legislative requirements."

- Apartment resident, OCN National Survey



Apartment households are not well prepared for shocks and stresses

- 85% of households lack the necessary food and drinking water to sustain themselves for 72 hours during a disaster.
- Only 3% have an Emergency Plan. This is significantly lower than the reported national average of 39%.
- 70% don't have a backup supply of medication or easy access to prescriptions.
- 48% don't have enough cash for alternative accommodation and expenses for up to one week (in the event of an evacuation) and 52% don't have alternative, short-term accommodation within 25km of their home.
- 74% of households don't know the location of their nearest safety refuge or community facility.

Residents lack awareness of emergency processes and infrastructure

- 56% of households don't know the location of the evacuation or meeting point.
- 32% don't know the location of the nearest fire extinguisher or hose.
- 44% don't know the location of utility shut off points.
- 75% don't subscribe to early alert notifications (for example Hazards Near Me).
- 37% don't know the location of the fire safety panel.
- Most owners corporations and committees are not actively planning for disasters or working to build resilience.
- There are not always clear evacuation plans in place, or residents are not aware of evacuation plans.
- Finding suitable emergency accommodation during and following an emergency event is challenging.

"Building manager would be unable to handle the situation."

- Apartment resident, OCN National Survey

"I would not delay but I think some neighbours may hesitate due to lack of trust in building management."

- Apartment resident, OCN National Survey



Photos: Wendy Showyin

KEEPING COOL AT ERKO

Heatwaves are a major threat to population health. According to [AdaptNSW](#), as a result of climate change, heatwaves are projected to be more intense, occur more often, and last longer.

With liveability and wellness in mind, the strata committee at Erko in Sydney's inner-city suburb of Erskineville has made it easier for residents to shade their apartments.

Owners had the opportunity to 'opt-in' to share the cost of drafting and registering a by-law for the installation of external heat reflecting awnings on balconies. The process was coordinated by a resident with architectural training. Residents agreed to a size specification that would not trigger a Development Application. This simplified the process and kept costs down.

The by-law provides pre-approval for owners to install awnings from two preferred suppliers, ensuring a consistent design and aesthetic and secure attachment method that does not compromise the integrity of common property. The awnings are fitted with wind sensors that retract during high winds and can be remotely activated. Owners are responsible for the cost of installation, along with ongoing maintenance and repair. At around \$6,000 per installation, the solution is highly effective but sadly not affordable for everyone.

What was the result?

Participating residents have been able regain full use of living areas that were once suffocatingly hot. Residents have described the difference as "cool like a cave" and "maybe five degrees cooler".

"I have dementia and am 88 years old. Whilst my neighbours are fantastic, I would have to rely on them to get down 10 flights of stairs in an emergency. This makes me very anxious."

- Apartment resident,
OCN National Survey

j. There are not clearly defined and understood roles and responsibilities regarding emergency planning, response, and recovery or incentivisation to upskill Individual apartment households are overwhelmingly not well prepared for shocks and stresses and operate on the basis that 'someone else will know what to do'

- Only 16% have an Emergency Communication Protocol.
- Only 8% of buildings have appointed an emergency coordinator.
- Only 5% have a pre-approved budget to fast track decisions relating to emergency expenditure.
- 0% have a media or public relations plan .
- 0% have an emergency powers by-law to deny access to the building.

"If I had my time again the first thing I would do is pass a motion giving the strata committee authority to act immediately in an emergency". Chair - Opal Towers

- In current legislation, it is not clear who is responsible for preparedness and resilience in an apartment building/ community.
- Residents and landlords do not understand who is in control during an emergency, or what information to trust.
- Overall lack of role clarity during an emergency.
- Managers of large apartment buildings will by default be the first line of response in an emergency and have a crucial role in managing situations before emergency responders arrive. Their knowledge of building specifications, layout and who is in the building cannot be underestimated.
- Emergency planning and risk assessment is not a core competency for building managers or strata managing agents.

k. Inadequate building design and performance standards pose emerging risks for apartment residents which are compounded by governance that limit climate adaptation measures. For example, many apartment communities are vulnerable to heat, and are overly dependent on mechanical cooling. In these buildings, sustained power outages can be extremely dangerous, and for some, life threatening

Apartment communities are vulnerable to heat, and are overly dependent on mechanical cooling

- 61% of households live in a building with other residents they consider would be vulnerable during an emergency or power outage.
- 27% live in a household where at least one person is aged over 70 or under 5 and is at risk to heat exposure.
- 27% describe the thermal comfort of their apartment as 'below average' on very hot days. Residents living on top floors were more likely to be exposed to heat risk.
- 73% have mechanical air conditioning however many described it as inadequate or under-performing.
- 66% don't use air conditioning or portable cooling devices 'sometimes' or 'often' due to concerns about running costs.
- 70% of households don't have external awnings, louvres, or ceiling fans.
- Anecdotally, the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme heat events is exacerbating the risk profile for older Australians living in apartments, especially those that live alone and are likely to be price sensitive due to fixed income.

Power outages create unique and potentially life-threatening challenges in apartment buildings

- 45% of households have been affected by power outages in the last two years, 30% of which lasted six hours or more
- 74% did not receive any instructions for what to do and 70% stayed home until power was restored.
- Reported consequences of power outages included lift failure (with residents stuck inside) and complete loss of visibility in car parks, foyers and fire stairs once battery operated emergency lighting runs out (typically at around 90-120 minutes) and exposure to security risks.
- Prolonged power outages are a threat to residents' who are dependent on electrical medical equipment, such as oxygen tanks and dialysis machines.

Governance issues can limit retrofitting of climate adaptation measures

- Both tenants and owners report having had requests for retrofits denied, either by landlords or strata. These ranged from installing air conditioning, external awnings and heat reflecting blinds, to roof insulation, block out curtains and shade cloths. Reasons for denying approval do not seem to have been well communicated or explained.

Building design can limit retrofitting of climate adaptation measures

- Many respondents say they'd like to install ceiling fans however unless they are correctly positioned in relation to fire sprinkler systems, they can compromise the fire safety compliance of the entire building.
- Requests to install air conditioning were also commonly denied on the basis of limited electrical capacity. This raises questions about electrification.
- A [2012 paper from QUT](#) stated "The vulnerability of taller buildings to the vagaries of climate and more extreme weather events and their reliance on main electricity was exposed when power outages immediately before, during and after the flood disaster seriously limited occupants' access and egress when elevators were disabled. Not all buildings were flooded but dwellings quickly became unliveable due to disabled air-conditioning."

"We have a very adversarial Strata Committee. If they don't like the idea, they will block you. They control votes."

- Apartment resident, OCN National Survey

" There needs to be better building standards. This apartment is totally exposed to the elements, built with steel and cement and quite obviously not planning for heat or cold."

- Apartment resident, OCN National Survey

I. The diversity of people living in apartments amplifies the challenges and can leave individuals particularly exposed to risks during emergencies and disasters. For example, emergency notifications may not cut through language barriers, and people with physical disabilities or limitations may have difficulty evacuating from buildings

- Physical infrastructure is often not suitable for people with a disability or those with diverse needs.

Some residents face additional challenges preparing for and responding to emergencies

- Many respondents are concerned health and mobility issues would prevent them evacuating their building using the fire stairs.
- Others expressed concern they would not be able to hear a fire alarm or public announcement, particularly if they were in the bathroom

We have 2 owners who are elderly, profoundly deaf and one of which has a cognitive impairment. They are ignored when it comes to communication, and strata committee does not accommodate their needs. They also refused to put in a visual smoke alarm so if there is an incident in the building, they would be alerted due the light flashing.

m. In some buildings, a lack of social connection and cohesion increases communication challenges and leaves residents more exposed to risk during emergencies

The single biggest hurdle to emergency or any other planning in our apartment block is the number of toxic relations between some owner-residents.

- There is not enough investment in, or shared understanding of, community development.
- Disconnected neighbours.
- Many apartment communities do not have strong social ties, or communication networks.
- Turnover and diverse needs within apartment communities are barriers to building social ties.
- A [Community Wellbeing Survey](#) by Willoughby City Council demonstrated that people who live in apartments are less likely to be actively engaged with their local community and more likely to experience loneliness or isolation. The impact of social isolation has been brought to light by the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting our most vulnerable groups such as the elderly and people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

n. Broad scale emergency preparedness campaigns tend to be single issue focused and lack relevancy for people who live in apartments

- A desktop review of public awareness campaigns shows they are targeted to standalone homes and typically focused on preparing for flood, bushfire and storms. They focus on household scale information, lacking a whole of building lens.
- While there are some resources available (e.g. [Residential Apartment Security Assessment](#) for Owners Corporation Committee from the Victorian Police), they are not broadly promoted.

o. Poor documentation of strata records can make it hard to identify building stakeholders. This exacerbates communications, emergency management, and recovery challenges

- There is no up-to-date list or single source regarding who lives in the building, and what support they might need/how they are vulnerable.
- There are a huge amount of stakeholders involved in responding to an emergency in an apartment building so coordination is a challenge (e.g. owner occupiers, renters, land lords, facility managers, strata managers, multiple real estate agents, multiple insurers, utility services, emergency services, local government, surrounding businesses, surrounding apartment communities, transport services, social service agencies).



HI NEIGHBOURS

Lane Cove and Willoughby City Council partnered with the Red Cross to deliver Meet Your Neighbours, an innovative pilot designed to encourage neighbourly connections in high-rise buildings.

Five buildings participated in the 8-month long program that incorporated events, activities and workshops that brought residents together to identify the strengths, opportunities and hazards in their community. Buildings were then able to apply for funding to support the implementation of place-based solutions.

[Meet Your Neighbours Toolkit](#) is an output of the award winning program and features downloadable templates, tools, advice, and examples to inspire community building in vertical communities.

p. Accessing all areas of an apartment building is a common challenge for emergency services

- Some survey respondents had concerns about emergency services having adequate access to their building or apartment.

*Feel that we are not prepared for emergencies.
Emergency services can't even get into building.*

- Emergency services gaining access to all areas of an apartment building can be challenging during an emergency.

OCCUPANTS UNAWARE OF EMERGENCY PROCEDURES PUT OTHERS AT RISK

On 6 September 2012, university student Connie Zhang and her friend Ginger Jiang fell from a window ledge after they had been trapped by a fire that had started on the balcony of their apartment in Bankstown, NSW. Tragically, Connie died on impact while Ginger survived, sustaining multiple, life-long injuries.

Whilst a multitude of design and compliance failures contributed to the tragedy, the [coroners report](#) also ruled the spread of the fire was accelerated by the fatal decision of a third occupant to leave the balcony and front door open when they escaped.

The gusty winds that day had the effect of creating a wind tunnel that forced the women to run into their bedroom, rather than escape via the front door. The tragedy sparked major reform of fire safety in apartment buildings, however as the survey results suggest, there is still a lack of awareness and knowledge of emergency processes.



Photo: ABC News



EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF THE OPPORTUNITIES TO EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN APARTMENT COMMUNITIES

a. Social connection and cohesion in apartment buildings may be stronger than we think. This could be leveraged to improve resilience

- 55% of households have the contact details of at least one neighbour in their building they could call on for help, and 50% say they know around 25% of their neighbours by name.
- Households are more likely to rate the sense of community in their building as average (48%) or strong (20%), than poor (32%).
- 45% of households live in a building that has an online platform for informal communication between residents. They are not always inclusive of tenants however.
- There was a strong sentiment of concern and willingness by respondents to provide practical support to vulnerable residents.



INSURANCE CHALLENGES ARE EMERGING

In February 2024 the Queensland Body Corporate Commissioner ordered the owners of a 114 lot Community Title Scheme in Fortitude Valley to obtain financing to accept an offer from Lloyds of London to take out a \$1.2 million insurance renewal for common property and assets.

The Australian insurance market was unwilling to accept the risk of insuring the scheme based on its claims history and known building defects. This represents a ten-fold increase from their previous insurance and is a forewarning of a further tightening of the strata insurance market.

b. State and local government can play a critical role in empowering apartment communities to better govern themselves and develop resident-led emergency response plans through opening up local capacity building funding streams to owners corporations

- Investment to improve strata literacy for
 - Residents
 - Landlords
 - Sector stakeholders (e.g. real estate agents, social service organisations)
 - Staff in government service agencies
 - Policy makers
- Affordable, subsidised, or funded services that support apartment communities are needed.
- Any regulation changes need to come with implementation support.
- Communication and coordination technology that can streamline the emergency response and recovery (e.g. opportunities to extend Strata Hub in NSW).
- Online induction into strata for renters at the point of lease, and owners at point of sale.
- An interim arrangement to register those affected by emergencies until the Register Find Reunite is established (e.g. the Disaster Victim Registration book previously used by Police could be a good solution).
- Need Government investment in preparedness, risk management and resilience in the strata sector.

"I would feel safer if there was a manual over-ride to the carpark. Whenever there is an electricity outage the gate is locked shut and cannot be opened. What if there was a fire down there?"

- Apartment resident, OCN National Survey

c. Apartment communities are hungry for tailored information, tools, and support

- There is a lack of tailored funding, guidance, tools, and support services for apartment communities.
- Need templates, check-lists, guides, and case studies to help owners corporations/committees to:
 - Assess risk
 - Improve preparedness
 - Build resilience
 - Strengthen community ties
 - Communicate within strata communities
 - Create resources tailored to building size
- Learning opportunities for owners corporation committee members, including formal training, peer-to-peer learning, and a helpline would be valued.
- Need support for committees to communicate effectively with residents and landlords, with awareness to transient, and culturally and linguistically diverse audiences. This includes leveraging all stakeholder channels (e.g. real estate agents and strata managers).

d. Peak industry bodies Strata Community Association and Owners Corporation Network, along with their members, have established communication channels into apartment buildings which could be leveraged to support preparedness

- There is a need for state-based or national communication campaigns to educate on strata living, materials to distribute, and training.

e. Existing legislation and codes can be used to drive emergency preparedness, climate adaptation retrofits and disaster resilience across the residential apartments sector

- Regulation/standards need to set expectations around preparedness and emergency management in apartment buildings.

f. Australia has an opportunity to provide international leadership in disaster risk reduction through supporting research at the intersection of apartment living, climate adaptation and disaster resilience

- Support from the insurance sector to encourage and advise on improving resilience and preparedness response (potentially with reduced premiums in buildings with advanced responses).

g. There are examples of good governance, adaptation projects, and risk management in apartments, that can be used as models to support sector wide improvement

- 15% of buildings have approved heat related retrofits or upgrades. Examples include tinted windows, double glazed windows, roof whirlybirds, external awnings, roof insulation (as part of the replacement of the roof membrane), shade sails, and heat reflecting flyscreens. One building reported they had rebuilt balconies wider to create more shade and another painted their building a lighter colour.

We have a large garden with pond and trees which lowers temperatures considerably.

We installed an extra exhaust fan in the lift in 2020 to make the lift cooler and also reduce risk of spread of Covid-19.



Fire and its aftermath at Metro Village Rosebery



Appendices

Survey Methodology

BACKGROUND

A first-of-its-type survey conducted by the Owners Corporation Network (OCN) sought to establish a baseline of the readiness of Australia’s apartment communities to respond to emergencies and disasters (climate and non-climate related). It also explores residents’ perceptions of liveability during one of the hottest summers on record.

The research is a response to a lack of empirical understanding into the current practices, barriers and opportunities to emergency preparedness in apartment communities.

The survey instrument was developed with input from stakeholders and tested prior to launch. To incentivise participation, respondents could opt-in to enter a draw to win a \$100 Coles/Myer voucher or an OCN annual membership valued up to \$495. Data was analysed in Excel. The survey was open from 8 October to 31 December 2023.

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

While every effort has been made to yield a robust data set, resource limitations impacted capacity to adopt a targeted sampling strategy or perform complex data analysis. The sample does not fully reflect the diversity of Australia’s apartment building stock or population. The results presented in this report should therefore be interpreted as indicative, rather than representative, of current practice.

PROMOTION AND SAMPLE SIZE

The survey was promoted by direct email to OCN members and subscribers, and shared on social media. Valuable cross-promotional support was provided by:

<u>Government</u>	<u>Industry</u>	<u>NGOs</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NSW Department of Customer Service• City of Sydney• Randwick Council• Resilient Sydney• Australian Local Government Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilities Management Australia• Strata Community Association (Vic)• LookUp Strata• Premium Strata• Your Strata Property• Flat-Chat• Go Strata• Bright and Duggan, ACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sweltering Cities• Better Renting• Residents 3000• Parents Climate Action Network

Linkila data analytics reports there were 2,870 unique visits to the survey.

There were 762 responses to the household survey and 234 responses to the committee survey, with a total of 996 responses.

National Survey: Apartment household survey results

The survey yielded a total of 762 responses. The typical respondent can be described as an owner occupier, living in a one- or two-person household, in a privately owned, medium-rise apartment in the inner-city suburbs of Sydney, NSW.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

Sector

99% privately owned housing

1% public housing

Tenure

76% own

24% rent

Strata committee representative

34% Yes

66% No

Household composition

37% live alone

46% 2-person household

14% family with dependents

Pets

31% Yes

69% No

Length of time at current address

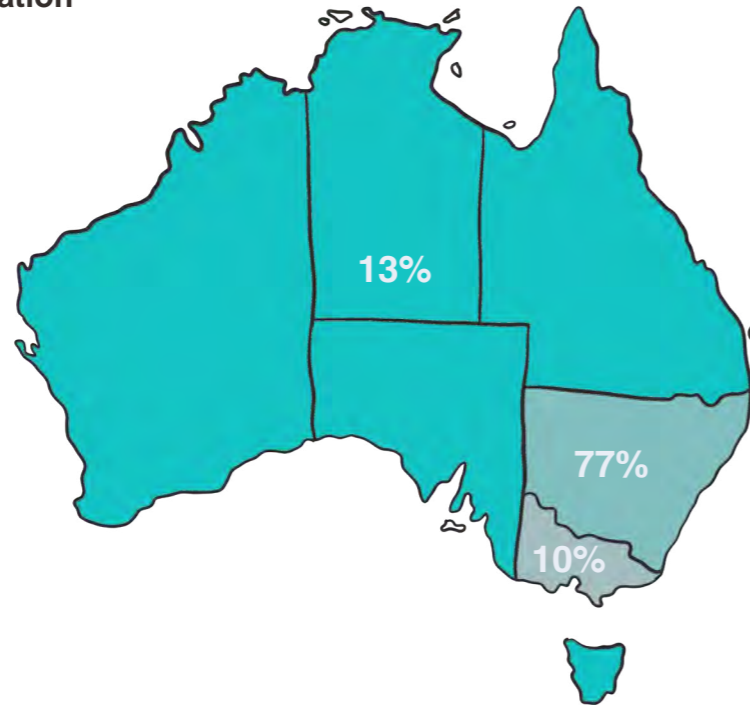
50% = 5+ years

Has a building/facilities manager or caretaker

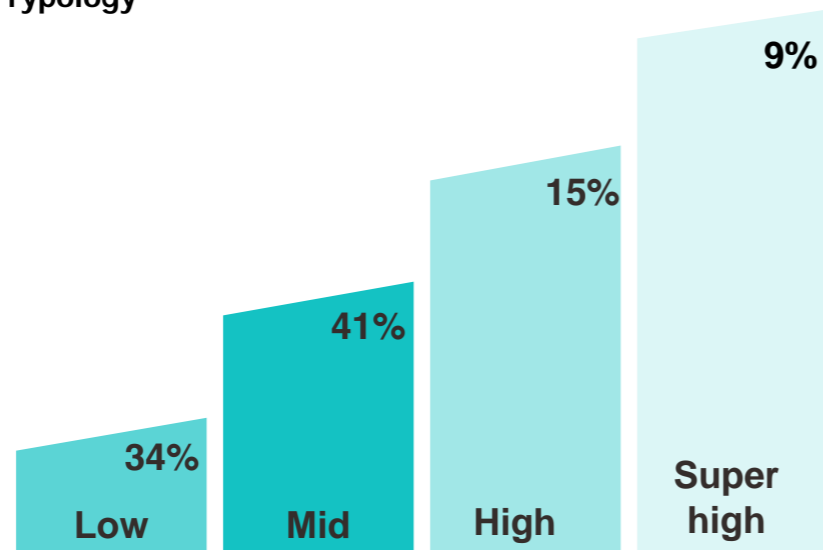
60% Yes

40% No

Location



Typology



HOUSEHOLD PREPAREDNESS

Q16. Does your household have any of the following? (select all that apply) n=635

The survey results show a low baseline of household preparedness and self-efficacy

97% don't have a Household Emergency Plan*

85% don't have a 72-hour supply of non-perishable food and drinking water

75% don't subscribe to early alert notifications (like Hazards Near Me)

60% don't have an Emergency Kit

*By comparison, [NRMA reports](#) 61% of the Australian population don't have a Household Emergency Plan (n=3500)



I'm on a pension so stocking up on things like bulk water & non perishables is difficult. Also cash for accom & expenses for a week would be impossible.

Q13. Does your building have an Emergency Plan to advise you what to do in an emergency? This is more comprehensive than an evacuation diagram n=635

Tenants and residents of super high-rise apartments are more likely to be 'unsure' if their building has an emergency plan.

Yes 13%

Unsure 36%

No 51%

RISK EXPOSURE

Q12. Have you experienced an emergency or disaster in your building in the last two years? For example, a gas explosion, flooding, cyber attack, security or safety threat. (yes, not, unsure) n=709

Less than 20% of respondents have experienced an emergency or disaster in their building in the last two years	None of the events described by respondents constituted a disaster and most were short in duration.	Most of the emergencies described by respondents were related to storm and flood damage. Burst water pipes, minor fires, and security threats were others.
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Excellent questions, which most wouldn't even consider in a high rise

Everyone in the building was so surprised that the Building Manager for a 20 storey building had no experience or skills to manage the flood and had not been trained in how to shut off the water mains or any other utility in the building.

It's shocking to realise how tragic it will be if there was an emergency or catastrophe here.

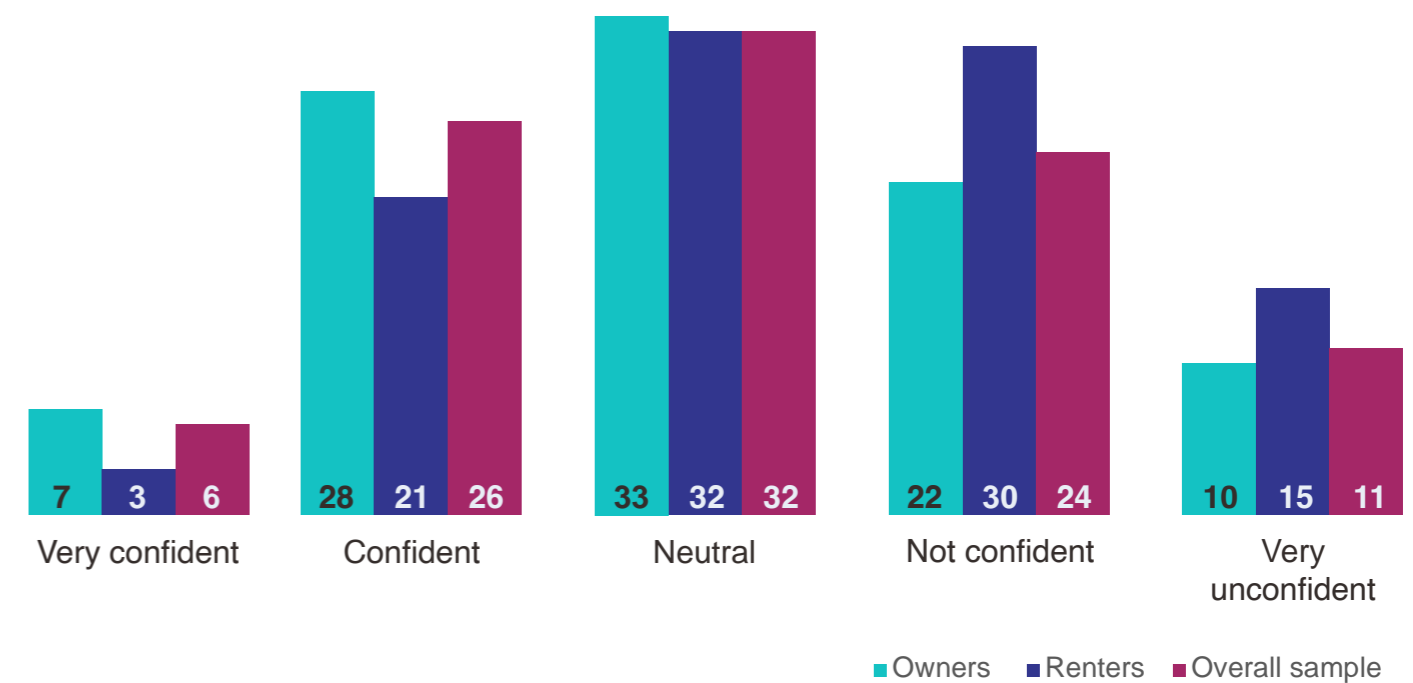
A selection of other scenarios described by respondents:

- We were evacuated due to threat of a gas explosion outside the building
- Blocked toilet flooded two floors
- An armed attacker wielding a machete forced entry and threatened another resident
- A heavily drugged intruder attempted to break into apartments and cars. WhatsApp communication alerted residents to stay indoors and not approach as per police instructions
- There was an earthquake a while ago and the building really shook. But there was no damage. We all freaked out though. Everyone ran out to the carpark in their PJs!
- We've had water leak through balconies and flood apartments underneath, with people having to move out for months. We've also had issues with AC failing during heatwaves
- The external fuse box caught fire and there was a risk of it spreading to other parts of the building. No alarms were set off as it was located outside. I saw the smoke and called the fire brigade. We tried to get residents to evacuate but many did not understand what was happening or didn't answer their doorbell
- The rooftop flooded like a swimming pool in a recent storm. Rain poured through the ceiling lights into our apartment and soaked the carpet. After three days, it was totally uninhabitable as the electricity jumped fuse. We had to find a hotel for temporary stay
- A tradie accidentally drilled through a shared wall into the hot and cold water mains resulting in a flood. The building manager was new, hadn't been trained and didn't know how to turn off the water. Water flowed freely through several floors and into the lift shafts for 2.5 hours before the plumber, who was stuck in traffic, was able to get to the building and shut off the water

PERCEIVED CONFIDENCE TO RESPOND TO AN EMERGENCY OR DISASTER

Q14. Generally speaking, how confident do you feel in your ability to respond to an emergency or disaster in your building? (5-point scale, very unconfident to very confident) n=635

Confidence is evenly distributed from very low to very high.	Tenants are less confident than owners in their ability to respond to an emergency or disaster in their building.	Confidence does not vary across building typologies.
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Q15. What would help you feel more prepared? (open-ended) n=380

The most common responses were:

- A plan with instructions for how to respond to specific scenarios
- Improved flow of communication between committee and residents, including tenants
- Knowing how to support my vulnerable neighbours
- Practice drills and training
- A louder fire alarm and public announcement system
- Knowing what support and assistance would be available for temporary accommodation
- More interest and engagement from residents
- Knowing my neighbours better
- Regular communication and discussion of emergency response procedures at meetings
- Communications in different languages
- Knowing that the building manager has skills and training



Guidelines from local/state govt TAILORED to different tiers of residential strata is what is needed

We need some way of knowing if our neighbours have mobility, sight or hearing issues which means they need help exiting their apartment, going down the stairs and exiting the building IF an emergency occurs.

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Q17. In the event of an emergency or disaster in your building, do you know the location of the following? (yes, no, unsure, NA) n=634

The survey results show low levels of situational awareness in relation to building safety systems that could prove catastrophic in an emergency.

56% don't know the location of the evacuation or meeting point	44% don't know the location of utility shut off points	37% don't know the location of the fire safety panel
74% don't know the location of the nearest safety refuge or community facility		32% don't know the location of the nearest fire extinguisher or hose



Reading this list makes me realise yes Body Corp really should provide this info to everyone on moving in week.

I only know these because I'm the Chair and have lived here 30 years so people come to me for everything .

Everyone in the building was so surprised that the Building Manager for a 20 storey building had no experience or skills to manage the flood and had not been trained in how to shut off the water mains or any other utility in the building.

PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO EVACUATION

Q18. If you were required to evacuate your building, what would delay you from leaving immediately? (multi-choice, select all that apply) n=635

40% general lack of preparedness	37% concern for my belongings	16% not having somewhere else to go
16% safety concerns	13% not knowing what to do with my pets	6-10% reported limited finances, medical or health condition, mobility issues, and lack of transport



I would not delay but I think some neighbours may hesitate due to lack of trust in building management

The only things that would delay me is gathering identity documents and if my cats were still roaming outside, I would find them first before I left

Not sure what the signal is to evacuate my building

Building is overcrowded. There's no way we would all get out safely

The desensitising effects of frequent false alarms are a major impediment to evacuation Not knowing whether it's a false alarm. There are fire alarms going off almost every week and it's always a false alarm (eg. someone burnt toast and didn't ventilate the room fast enough), if a serious fire was happening we probably wouldn't take it seriously

Not sure I'd recognise a real emergency if one happened

POWER OUTAGES

Q.29 Have you experienced a power outage/s in your building in the last two years? (yes/no). n=619

45% experienced a building wide power outage in the last two years	30% lasted six hours or more	70% stayed home until power was restored	74% did not receive any instructions for what to do
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I would feel safer if there was a manual over-ride to the carpark. Whenever there is an electricity outage the gate is locked shut and cannot be opened. What if there was a fire down there?

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Q22. How would you describe the overall sense of community/neighbourliness in your building? (poor, average, strong) n=628

The survey results suggest higher levels of social connectedness than anticipated.

48% describe the sense of community in their building as average, or about right	55% have the contact details for at least one neighbour they could call on for help in an emergency	50% know at least 25% of their neighbours by name*
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* By comparison, results from the national [Australia Talks](#) survey report 62% of respondents know their neighbours by name (n=60,000)



There is an overall sense of camaraderie between residents, and people are friendly. There is a mix of owners and renters (mostly renters).

Everyone is very pleasant and friendly when I do see them

We are fortunate to live in an excellent community with well thought out emergency procedures.

There's high turnover the last couple of years especially, I suspect from increasing rent. Makes it hard to build up community

Many decent people but very divided community because of bullying committee.

Most don't even say good morning in the lift. lots of Air B&B and renters who have no interest in a community. 10% of apartments are empty! This should be illegal!

Friendly, but not involved

Antagonistic. Owners treat renters with disdain and won't communicate even about basic things.

It used to be fantastic, but the current committee are secretive and don't communicate about anything - only just meet minimum legislative requirements.

Q20. Does your building have a way for residents to communicate or socialise outside of formal meetings? n=629

45% live in a building that has communication platforms (such as WhatsApp, closed Facebook group, newsletters, occasional social events, email and SMS distribution lists).

37% say the communications are inclusive of owners and tenants, 32% are unsure.



The building has a whatsapp group and it works really well for both social interaction (especially during the lockdowns), and giving tips to newcomers, and organising get togethers.

RESIDENT VULNERABILITY

Some groups of people are more likely to be negatively impacted by shocks and stressors. This includes older people, young children, people with a disability or chronic illness and people experiencing a mental health condition. People’s attachment to pets can also create additional challenges.

Q9. Do any of the following apply to either yourself or members of your household? (select all that apply) n=725

33% have a pet	12% mental health condition	2% dependent on electrically operated medical equipment
15% person/s with a disability or chronic illness	22% person/s aged 70+	6% person/under age 5

Q.34 Are there residents in your building that you think would be vulnerable during an emergency or a power outage?

61% live in a building with other residents they perceive may be vulnerable during an emergency or power outage.



I have dementia and am 88 years old. Whilst my neighbours are fantastic, I would have to rely on them to get down 10 flights of stairs in an emergency. This makes me very anxious.

I don't have certainty of being able to respond to an emergency in my own right. I have a cat who is a companion and I certainly cannot cage the cat and bring it with me on my own. I couldn't carry her and my emergency pack with pills etc.

I would not be able to open the heavy fire safety door. We have 2 owners who are elderly, profoundly deaf and one of which has a cognitive impairment. They are ignored when it comes to communication, and strata committee does not accommodate their needs. They refused to put in a visual fire alarm so if there is an incident in the building, they would be alerted by a flashing light.

The basement carpark gets very stuffy and has WOEFUL ventilation. Anybody with respiratory issues who needed to spend any extended time there would find themselves very quickly in trouble.

It would be great if apartment complexes could share resources or communiques to residents to encourage them to look out for vulnerable neighbours ie elderly people during extreme heat or power outages.

HEAT VULNERABILITY

The timing of the survey coincided with one of the hottest summers on record in Australia. A sub-set of questions were incorporated into the survey to capture insights into how rising temperatures are impacting the lives of residents living in apartments. n=619

88% consider an outdoor temperature of 30 degrees and above to be 'very hot'	27% describe the comfort of their apartment as below average on 'very hot' days
73% have air conditioning however in many cases it was described as inadequate or underperforming	66% don't use air conditioning or portable cooling devices 'sometimes' or 'often' due to price sensitivity
45% don't have cross-ventilation or fly screens on balcony doors and windows	70% don't have external window awnings or louvres
70% don't have ceiling fans (and many would like them)	27% live in a household with people aged under 5 or over 70 who are at vulnerable to heat exposure
Outdoor air quality, smoke drift and noise pollution limit opportunities for natural cross-ventilation	Building lacks electrical capacity needed to allow residents to install airconditioning



There needs to be better building standards. This apartment is totally exposed to the elements, built with steel and cement and quite obviously not planning for heat or cold.

I close blinds and run the aircon from early AM all day, but it's not enough to keep the unit from being unbearable. My candles even melt, indoor plants die. The unit feels like it's on fire!

The building has black mould issues so anytime I am required to use the aircon in extreme heat, the moisture and mould affects me adversely so it's a vicious catch22

It becomes inhabitable in the hot months. No fans, air conditioning and windows not positioned well. Also can't open them as no fly screens means all the insects come in.

We don't have aircon. We used to have a nice tall shade tree and a big full privacy bush, but both were recently chopped down because the committee wanted to just have plain lawn. So we have even more direct sun now hitting our apartment and it has made a noticeable difference.

It is so frustrating to not be able to get airflow, especially when the southerly has come through. Poor window design is a big issue & makes me dependent on my air conditioner when it shouldn't be necessary.

Renters are really stuck when it comes to climate controlled living - or even just landlords/government ensuring there are minimum required standards to be met for comfortable living - such as mandatory reverse cycle heat/cooling. My apartment gets dangerously hot when temps reach high 30's, I struggle to focus on work and I get really concerned about my dog.

Despite being able to open our balcony door to get fresh air in which would help cool the apartment down after very hot days, we don't due to both pollution and noise reasons.

It would be amazing to have better rights for tenants and for strata to forget about "building aesthetics" when it comes to practical things like screens on windows and doors.

Our building is relatively new (about 10 years) and most apartments are east/ west facing. We are east facing and the apartment can heat up very quickly even on days that aren't that hot. The heat seems to stay around and opening the doors to the balcony doesn't do much since there's no cross flow. I hate to think what the west facing apartments are like in summer. The only way to cool the apartment is with the air conditioning, which is expensive even when we only run it at 23/24 degrees.

I think it should be mandatory for cooling retrofit to be considered by the body corporate and also encouraged by the government.

After living where I have lived for 4 years, when looking for my next apartment/house, aircon (or at the bare minimum, a ceiling fan) will be a high priority consideration. Foliage and tree cover is also a high priority because it helps shade and keep a building cool naturally (and for free!) while also providing other intrinsic benefits.

Strata Committee has too much power. It won't address residents concerns about heat management. They treat requests in isolation not as a building deficit.

Govt advise / guidance got strata's is very poor - it's a no man's land



National Survey: Committee survey results

A total of 234 valid responses were received. 85% of responses were from NSW. Respondents were typically the Chair or Secretary of a low or medium rise apartment building located in the inner-city suburbs of Sydney, NSW. There is an under-representation of responses from self-managed schemes.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

Role

Chair 33%
 Secretary 32%
 Non office bearer 18%
 Treasurer 14%
 Joint effort 3%

OCN brand awareness

77% had heard of the Owners Corporation Network before completing the survey
 21% are a member of the Owners Corporation Network

Building age

65% constructed pre-2000

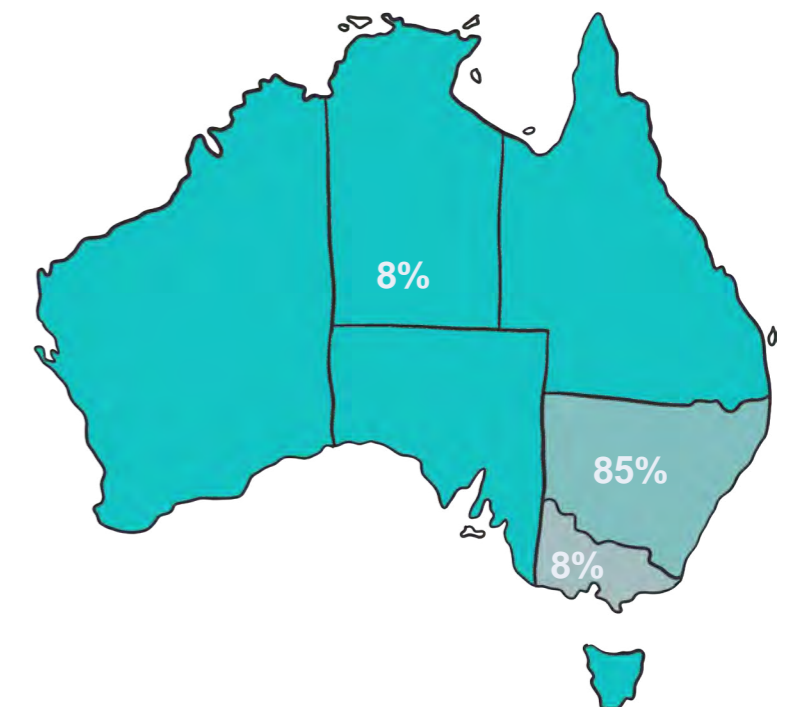
Building composition

72% residential only i.e. not mixed-use
 Owner occupied: tenanted 50:50

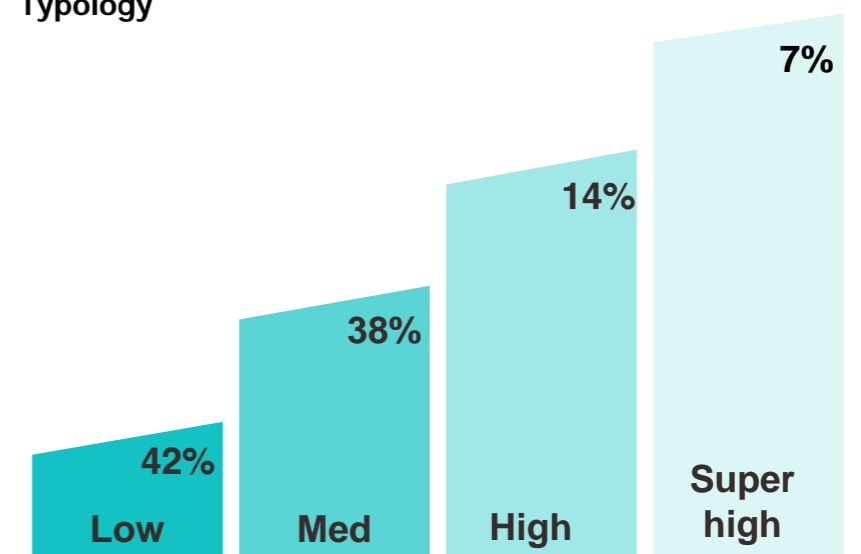
Services to the Owners corporation

95% have a strata managing agent
 39% have a building manager/caretaker
 62% have engaged an insurance broker
 19% have engaged a risk/health safety consultant

Location



Typology



CONFIDENCE IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Q9. How confident are you in the ability of your committee to respond to an emergency or disaster? (select one) n=207

Higher levels of confidence were reported for high-rise and super high-rise buildings.

25% Very unconfident	15% Not confident
44% Neutral	
20% Confident	7% Very confident

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANS

Note: The survey measured the proportion of buildings that have voluntarily adopted some form of emergency response plan or protocol. Owing to confusion between the terms 'emergency plan' and 'evacuation plan', the actual proportion of buildings with some form of coordinated emergency plan is likely to be lower than the reported 16%.

Q11. Does your building have an Emergency Response Plan, Crisis Management Plan or equivalent? n=205

16% have an Emergency Response Plan	35% unsure how often the plan is reviewed	Super high-rise buildings are more likely to have an emergency plan
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Who was involved in developing the plan?

3% residents	50% committee members and building manager	35% strata managing agent	20% safety/risk consultant
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How is the plan communicated?

According to respondents, the plans are mainly communicated to residents by email, notice board displays and uploading to the online building portal.



Evacuation plans on all floors, plan posted to BuildingLink for all residents and owners, information on notice board and elements are regularly included in quarterly newsletters

Q17. Which of the following barriers would prevent your committee from developing an Emergency Response Plan? (select all that apply) (n=192)

56% Skills or knowledge gaps	53% Disengaged owners	38% Time constraints	35% Competing priorities
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Motivation is the issue. Nobody in our building foresees a flood, a fire, an earthquake and the motivation isn't there

About 70% of owners are generally un-engaged in any matters concerning effective management of the complex and its finances

Owners generally don't care, and most units are tenanted and they barely talk let alone cooperate

Disengaged Chair, proper practical knowledge of scenarios, and lack of ability to communicate

Have never thought about it

Not a regulatory requirement

Not seeing Emergency Planning as the Committees responsibility

It's bad enough trying to keep up with reactive stuff as volunteers, being proactive is another level. We will need to leave full time employment

We have a committee of five. Probably only one of them would know what to do (me). I've been on the committee for most of the past 12 years. Sadly most of our owners just aren't interested in participating

All of the work usually falls to 1-2 committee members who in the past have spent 20+ hours a week on unpaid strata duties

Q18. Who would you be most likely to seek advice from if you were to develop an Emergency Plan? (open-ended) (n=192)

Respondents were most likely to refer to their strata managing agent or building manager for advice on developing a plan. Other sources were safety consultants, local council, Owners Corporation Network and Fire and Rescue. Many respondents were unsure and only a few respondents mentioned drawing on the skills and expertise of residents.



I thought our building managers may have been across emergency protocols but unfortunately they are not


I'd expect the Strata Management company we employ to have suitable Emergency Plans for all the different types of buildings they manage

Shared input from key residents and committee members who have professional backgrounds

Our committee would have the skills, just not the time and energy to initiate this project

Q19. What would incentivise your committee to develop an Emergency Response Plan? (select all that apply) (n=192)

78% online templates and resources	56% online education and training	54% State or local government financial assistance (i.e. rebate, micro grant)
54% Financial incentives from insurance companies		48% Regulation

 *We need to raise the awareness (inside and outside our strata committee) of what could be an emergency *relevant to our strata building*. It's not on our radar screen currently.*

Online sources of templates and procedures to follow would be very useful

We find it difficult to find appropriate expertise on what our legal obligations are. So assistance in deciding what is necessary vs sensible vs not required would be really helpful. We need the government to be in charge instead of leaving the private providers that do not have interest on us but the shareholders.

Encouragement from the strata manager

There are so many other priorities, and so any emergency planning is low on our list of priorities.

Regulations or rebates from insurance companies is the best way to get movement in strata schemes I find.

Support and advice that is specific to the type of building we are in. Residents are tired of implementing things that are clearly more applicable to different types of residences. And these things come with costs. WHS/Fire/Locks/10 year plans/ safety checks etc etc

Clearer rules governing strata living and I would like to see more information on what it means living in strata provided to all new owners and residents

EXPERIENCE WITH DISASTER

Q10. Has your building been impacted by an emergency or disaster in the last two years? (apart from COVID-19). Briefly describe what happened n=207

15% have been impacted by an emergency or disaster. The most commonly reported emergencies related to storms, flooding and burst water pipes.


Other examples provided by respondents included:

- Explosion of water heater in an apartment caused a huge flood and extensive damage to two apartments and the internal stairs
- Gas meters were upgraded and incorrectly installed causing the water heater to burst and flooding hot water to all the floors below. Residents needed to be relocated while the floor boards were replaced
- Loss of power to the building for 3 days due to fallen street tree damaging power lines
- A cooking fire broke out in a ground floor apartment when the tenant left food cooking in a pan on his stove
- Car caught fire in basement. Firefighters were here for 7 hours
- 15 Hour Blackout last summer during a heatwave
- Suicide
- A crane fell onto our building from an adjacent building site
- A large truck crashed into the dividing fence and damaged the electricity distribution box. Power supply was immediately disconnected by Ausgrid. The accident happened in August and our building is still without grid power connected more than three months later. A diesel powered generator set (provided under our insurance policy) is on site and providing power to our building. It needs refuelling daily
- We had a fire alarm and as the building manager and the strata manager were away, no one knew who lived in the apartment that caused the alarm. The fire brigade had to break down their front door. There was no one inside the apartment but a meal in the oven was burning. The owners corporation had to pay for a new fire door. The building manager asked the strata manager for a copy of the strata roll in case the situation occurred again. The strata manager said the executive committee refused to permit this. I don't think the strata manager and building manager should be away at the same time AND I think the building manager should have a copy of the strata roll for use (particularly during evacuations).

RISK MITIGATION MEASURES

Q15. Does your building have any of the following? (n=197)

52% master contact list	37% site plans, engineers drawings, electrical line diagrams	35% emergency trades list (on display)	23% operating manuals and warranties for key plant & equipment
16% emergency communication protocol	14% list of vulnerable residents & pets	14% defibrillator training	13% fire safety drills
9% first aid training	8% nominated emergency coordinator	6% fire warden training	5% pre-approved discretionary budget for emergency response
1% emergency powers by-law to deny access to the building	0% media/Public Relations plan	0% details of the insurance company visible from the outside of the building	28% none of these


 *I have said several times that we should attend to these points but it has yet to happen*

Getting residents, both owners and tenants, to actively participate in anything (e.g, fire safety drills) is impossible

We are a super high-rise building and have fire and floor warden training every 6 months with TrimEVAC

Q16. Does your building have any of the following equipment or facilities? (n=197)


42% fibre-to-curb telecommunications (more reliable in severe weather)	35% SUMP pump	17% defibrillator	17% rainwater tank
14% First aid kit	13% EV charging	12% emergency generator	8% rooftop solar

 *We would be particularly interested in a rebate on a defibrillator as we have at least two people in the block who have had heart surgeries*

HEAT ADAPTATION


Q20. How would you describe the comfort of your apartment building during summer? (n=191)

9% say their building is below average on hot days (as in, unbearably hot).

 *The foyer gets really hot and stuffy, no air flow when its humid outside. Heat rises in the building. Insects congregate in the corners of the foyer walls.*

Awful. I'm on the top floor unit with no insulation.

15% have approved upgrades or retrofits to make the building cooler.

 *Some apartments have installed double glazed windows to assist with temperature and noise abatement - no issues with installation*

A number of apartments have installed heat reflecting flyscreens on western wall of balcony.

Some west facing owners have installed double glazing, solar film, all have reverse cycle aircon. Lack of roof insulation

A minority of apartments have A/C. We have limited electricity capacity. Some apartments have installed ceiling fans which work very well.

Most apartments have split system a/c but it's not standard - were added on

Some apartments have A/C, limited by one 10A power circuit per unit. Tenants tend to use portable A/C with exhaust through window

Nothing - lack of electrical capacity for air-conditioning

We installed an extra exhaust fan in the lift in 2020 to make the lift cooler and also reduce risk of spread of covid

Insulated concrete roof when replacing waterproof membrane

We have allowed external awning blinds.

We permitted after market louvers

Shade sale installed on roof top garden area.

We have done significant revegetation, which has helped with cooling off building

Roof whirlybirds installation 2-years ago.

We re-built all balconies to be wider to create more shade

Some residents are installing external heat reducing blinds under the provisions of a by-law. I assisted the group with managing the process and developing the bylaw. We shared the cost of registering the bylaw and have a choice of two standard designs.

We painted the building a much lighter colour, white and light grey

Q23. Has your building experienced a power outage/s in the last two years? (n=191)

46% experienced power outages	16% 6-12 hours duration	8% 12+ hours duration
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We had no lift access, automatic glass entry doors had to be left permanently open (security risk). After 2 hours no emergency lighting (garage and fire stairs were pitch black), auto garage door needed to be opened manually and left open (security risks). Strata committee organised security guard to improve security overnight and allow residents access to their floors via the fire stairs. Fire stairs doors had to be kept open (safety hazard). All apartments have one set of fire stair keys in case of this emergency for lot access when lifts are not available.

Only key to access fire door is held by building manager – residents unable to re-enter their floors

The building has a generator so common area lighting, sump pumps and lifts continued to operate. There was no power inside apartments.

Some residents trapped in lifts for couple of hours until lift company could free them.

Most were ok however, one resident with emergency oxygen equipment had to rely on battery back up.

Lift failure, NBN services out and emergency lighting batteries ran out and garage door stuck open reducing security in basement car parking.

No electrical power at all for 3 days. Residents depended on friends and neighbours to have access to fridges and freezers and on neighbours to access gas cooking facilities and emergency lighting.

After the power outage the timers for lighting were delayed causing total darkness in the fire stairs for 3 months.

FINANCIAL

Q27. Has the cost of your strata insurance gone up in the last two years (assuming you have the same base level of coverage)? (n=189)

95% report the cost of strata insurance has increased	25% have experienced problems renewing or accessing insurance	75% have not made a claim	25% have made a claim
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Almost all of the claims related to damage associated with burst water pipes and water ingress.

Many respondents commented they are reluctant to make claims and carefully weigh up the cost of claiming or not.



Two burst hot water systems (internal tanks). One event over \$40,000 affected two apartments. The hot water tank in question was under warranty. After decades of no claims to double the premium and add \$40,000 excess for any event is an over reaction.

We had 2 claims - each about \$10,000. Smaller claims (like smashed glass door) we wore. Our policy is high as we have outstanding rectification works (which have now commenced).

Our claim for storm damage due to sea water surges was refused

Insurance paid \$50k for various rectification works for storm damage, but the works took 2 years to complete and we paid increased insurance premiums since then.

NCAT dispute over water ingress into an apartment has been notified to the insurer. We couldn't get a competing quotation for our insurance from three insurers approached by the insurance broker so had to stay with the incumbent.

Q32. On balance, are there enough funds in the Capital Works Fund to carry out the planned works over the next two years? (n=185)

75% have sufficient capital works funds to carry out scheduled works.

Many respondents reported special levies have, or are about to be, raised to cover higher than forecast costs of scheduled works.



Roof waterproof membrane replacement was not budgeted and we are likely to require a strata loan as estimates are in excess of \$1m. Most owners have chosen to limit works rather than increase funds according to what is needed

Our building is quite old and has suffered over the years from successive strata committees who were unwilling to increase levies or raise special levies for essential capital works and maintenance. We have recently increased quarterly levies and raised a special levy for painting of the building and replacement of some windows but there are still several large jobs to complete and not much appetite for further increases.

We have a fully funded maintenance plan in place since day 1. The plan is prepared by a Quantity Surveyor and is updated completely every 5 years and includes all major capital items and has over 200. The replacement cost is adjusted annually and a full revaluation undertaken every 2 years for Insurance

Roof waterproof membrane has failed earlier than expected and is not budgeted for in the plan

We have raised special levies in the last 2 years of \$1.3m, for the fire safety upgrade Order renovations, the roof membrane replacement, replacing all the exterior windows and balcony doors, and replacing our lift.

We've just been hit with a MASSIVE fire order, that expects us to retrofit sprinklers to every apartment in a building over 40 years old!

Broadly yes. we have to plan and stage. We had a 2million dollar passive fire and damper rectification costs. This threw us so with special levies and cut backs (no upgrade of external lighting) we have started to boost funds.

We have a strong personality on the committee who is constantly advocating to lower the amount kept in the capital works fund.

We have raised special levies in the last 2 years of \$1.3m fire order notice, replacement of roof membrane, replacing all the exterior windows and balcony doors, and replacing our lift.

Q33. Overall, has there been a higher-than-normal increase in the late payment of levies over the last 12 months? (n=186)

20% experienced an increase in the late payment of levies.



We introduced an 'incentive' for early payment which has encouraged 100% of owners to pay on time for the first time in 6 years.

We are fortunate to have owners who understand the committee manages the building works carefully. Works and costs are reported 3-monthly by Chair to owner to promote transparency.

We rigorously pursue owners and if necessary take necessary recovery action. If necessary obtaining Supreme Court Orders to sell up the property but we have never had to enforce that the person paid at the Court along with our costs.

Q34. What are the priorities for your committee in the next 24 months? (open-ended) (n=173)

The most common priorities related to fire safety compliance, rectification of water ingress issues, exterior painting, roof replacement, lift upgrades and general maintenance. A number of respondents cited electrical upgrades, EV charging and installing solar PV.



Maintain the building and safety and requirements with minimum fuss. Manage the budget sensibly with consensus. Maintain harmony.

Keeping the admin fund in surplus, ensuring the capital works fund stays in a healthy balance, ensuring the insurance premiums at renewal are competitive and tweaking the policy to save on premiums.

Maintenance updates - old Committee did NOT enact any item from any planned maintenance program for over 10 years.

My priority is to remove disengaged committee members to work more effectively. The majority of the committee want to spend as little as possible.

Minimise conflict



Virtual Stakeholder Roundtable

ABOUT

This report documents discussions and insights from the Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Resilience in Apartment Buildings Round Table.

As the number of apartment buildings in our cities grows, the unique challenges associated with apartment living are becoming more prevalent.

To ensure the safety and wellbeing of people living in apartments, it is critical that all stakeholders better understand the challenges, and work together on solutions.

On Monday 11 September 2023, Owners Corporation Network (OCN) brought together a diverse set of stakeholders to discuss issues and opportunities related to emergency preparedness and disaster resilience in apartment buildings.

Join at menti.com use code 7370 8835

OCN

Emergency preparedness and disaster resilience in apartment buildings

Virtual Stakeholder Roundtable

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ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES SUMMARY

During the Roundtable, attendees discussed issues and opportunities across three phases - preparedness, during the disaster or emergency, and in recovery. This section summarises the most common issues and opportunities identified across all phases. Detailed notes for each phase are documented in subsequent sections.

During the discussions, it became clear how intertwined emergency and disaster challenges are with the general function or dis-function of apartment buildings and communities.

Fundamental issues include:

- Very low level of strata literacy across the board in Australia
- Overworked and under-resourced volunteer owners corporation committees
- Disconnected neighbours
- A lack of relevant, tailored programs, templates, and educational materials for the apartment context

Addressing these issues will not only support better preparedness and resilience, they are critical to improve the overall long-term livability of apartment buildings, and the functioning of the communities that call them home.

Issues

- Physical infrastructure is often not suitable for people with a disability or those with diverse needs
- It is near impossible to communicate with all apartment owners and renters due to language and technology barriers, and because landlords do not live on-site
- Most owners corporations and committees are not actively planning for disasters or working to build resilience
- Owners corporation committees have a huge remit. Emergency preparedness and resilience are just one more thing they need to do in a context where they're already overworked
- Most committees are essentially volunteer run. They are unlikely to have the expertise required to plan for emergencies
- Investment in resilience and emergency preparedness are in direct competition with a large list of other potential priorities
- Where emergency protocols do exist in an apartment building, they are often not communicated clearly, are not understood by occupants, or simply not in the awareness of those living on site
- Many apartment occupiers are not aware of the risks / issues they and their community faces
- While awareness about fire has increased, issues such as heatwaves and power outages are overlooked
- Even people who live or own in an apartment building have low levels of strata literacy

- There are low levels of strata literacy in government and community service agencies that intersect with apartment communities. This is associated with an Australia-wide blind-spot where "residential" is typically used as a shorthand for standalone homes, and the unique circumstances of strata are overlooked
- In current legislation, it is not clear who is responsible for preparedness and resilience in an apartment building/community
- There is no up-to-date list or one source of truth regarding who lives in the building, and what support they might need/how they are vulnerable
- The relationship ecosystem within strata is extremely complex, making day-to-day communication challenging (e.g. owner occupiers, renters, land lords, facility managers, strata managers, real estate agents)
- There are not always clear evacuation plans in place, or residents are not aware of evacuation plans
- There are a huge amount of stakeholders involved in responding to an emergency in an apartment building so coordination is a challenge (e.g. owner occupiers, renters, land lords, facility managers, strata managers, multiple real estate agents, multiple insurers, utility services, emergency services, local government, surrounding businesses, surrounding apartment communities, transport services, social service agencies)
- Residents and landlords do not understand who is in control during an emergency, or what information to trust
- Overall lack of role clarity during an emergency
- Many apartment communities do not have strong social ties, or communication networks
- Turnover and diverse needs within apartment communities are barriers to building social ties
- There is a lack of tailored funding, guidance, tools, and support services for apartment communities
- Many owners corporations, committees, and residents are not confident about their insurance coverage and claims processes
- Finding suitable emergency accommodation during and following an emergency event is challenging
- Emergency services gaining access to all areas of an apartment building can be challenging during an emergency

Opportunities

- Templates, check-lists, guides, and case studies to help owners corporations/committees to:
 - Assess risk
 - Improve preparedness
 - Build resilience
 - Strengthen community ties
 - Communication within strata communitiesResources should be tailored to building size
- Affordable/subsidised or funded services that support apartment communities to deliver the above
- Regulation/standards to set expectations around preparedness and emergency management in apartment buildings
- Any regulation changes to come with implementation support
- Learning opportunities for owners corporation committee members, including formal training, peer-to-peer learning and helpline
- Support for committees to communicate effectively with residents and landlords, with awareness to transient, and culturally and linguistically diverse audiences. This includes leveraging all stakeholder channels (e.g. real estate agents and strata managers)
- Investment to improve strata literacy for:
 - Residents
 - Landlords
 - Sector stakeholders (e.g. real estate agents, social service organisations)
 - Staff in government service agencies
 - Policy makers
- This could include state-based or national communication campaigns to educate on strata living, materials to distribute, and training
- Online induction into strata for renters at the point of lease, and owners at point of sale
- Communication and coordination technology that can streamline the emergency response and recovered (e.g. opportunities to extend Strata Hub in NSW?)
- Interim arrangement to register those affected by the emergency until the Register Find Reunite is established (e.g. the Disaster Victim Registration book previously used by Police could be a good solution)
- Support to improve evacuation knowledge and protocols within apartment communities
- Support from the insurance sector to encourage and advise on improving resilience and preparedness response (potentially with reduced premiums in buildings with advanced responses)
- A stronger focus on inclusive community connection within apartment buildings
- Government investment in preparedness, risk management and resilience in the strata sector

PREPAREDNESS ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Following is a verbatim summary of the issues and opportunities relevant to the preparedness phase, that were recorded during the Round Table discussions.

To help understand key themes, the issues and opportunities have been collated under subheadings.

Preparedness Issues

Apathy

- False alarms de-sensitise people
- How to overcome apathy and get residents interested in collective safety
- Apathy towards preparation. Understanding of policy and clarity of shared responsibility
- Getting people to engage with emergency preparedness in stable times
- Unit owner and resident apathy is a big issue
- No one is prepared
- Recognising the increased risk and impacts of severe weather on how and where we live
- It won't happen to me attitude

Diverse needs

- People with hearing impairments or those who use communication aids may face challenges in receiving timely and accurate emergency information
- People with disability facing barriers such as Physical Accessibility Issues, Communication Barriers, Lack of Evacuation Plans, Inadequate Training and Awareness, Out-of-Date Building Codes etc
- Language/cultural barriers for non-English speaking residents

Transient occupants

- Many strata communities are transient e.g. renters, Airbnb. Hard to build communities when many aren't invested
- Transience of renters requires constant re-education
- High volume of rentals

Regulation and standards

- No regulatory requirements for residential multi-unit dwellings
- Regulation?? What MUST be done
- Strata legislation too complex for owners to govern well
- Lack of legislation requiring ECOs in residential buildings
- Lack of standard/consistent guidance to help OC's
- No incentives to have plan
- Who is responsible? Strata law is developed by state gov yet state doesn't invest enough to make this resilient and safe

Lack of community connection

- Not enough investment/shared understanding of community development
- The research shows that apartment communities are often less connected than communities in detached housing - impacting resilience and capacity to respond/recover from emergencies
- Connection between residents

Communications, education and guidance

- Information about building specific protocols is not well communicated
- Many safety comms are narrowly focused on fire only
- More education for owners and members of the strata committee around compliance in buildings so in the event of an emergency their building can pass minimum test
- (Still) no centralised government communication platform that reaches all schemes across NSW (strata hub)
- Engaging people in preparedness activities. Understanding the role that they can play
- Communication of the personal responsibility for elements of the plan. Developing a workable strategy to raise awareness of the problem
- Owners unsure where to get advice from even if they do want to be proactive

Over work and competing issues

- Building representatives under a lot of competing pressures
- Priorities in terms of the massive workload on volunteer strata committees already
- Priorities in terms of the massive workload on volunteer strata committees already
- Not all buildings have a building manager. Typically 200 lots or more
- Building managers and residents do not have time or resources to do the work for emergency preparedness
- Strata committees stretched with day to day. Lack of guidance for committees
- Volunteer nature of strata governance does not meet the serious challenges here
- Limited capabilities and lack of support to develop skills

Lack of trust

- Trust and understanding if EM processes
- Lack of engagement and trust

The complexity of strata

- Poor strata literacy generally - people don't understand their responsibilities living in multi occupied housing
- Decision making is complex in strata - making it harder to invest in solutions around mitigation or adaptation to climate impacts
- Complex relationships & obligations - owner occupiers, tenants, resi/commercial
- Don't know who is in the building that may be vulnerable
- Multiple managers - Building manager Strata Manager Property Manager Committee Education, skills gap
- Poor governance — strata rolls, notification of tenants in units
- Where there are no onsite managers, communication with residents is difficult
- Not having ready to go contact lists of residents (owners and tenants). Everyone thinks something else will know what to do. Who is that someone else?

Forward planning and role clarity

- Some multi-occupied buildings, especially older ones, may not have adequate evacuation plans in place. This can result in confusion and disorganization during evacuations, making it difficult for people with disabilities to navigate the process safely
- Lack of clarity for OC exposure to legally liability - residential exemption WHS
- Lack of coordination and collaboration with owners, tenants, council, emergency services, community organisations and others
- Updating strata rolls should be mandatory under Property Stock & Agents Act
- Assigning central responsibility for disaster preparedness

Other

- Close Proximity of buildings to each other in inner city.
- Under or non- insured

Preparedness Opportunities

Education and guidance

- Materials and guidance to help owners corporations identify and manage risks
- Tailor for building size - high high rise need more than walk-ups
- A "little black book" for strata communities - contacts, emergency numbers, what to do if info
- Engage residents in preparedness steps advocated by agencies e.g. personal emergency plan, use of fire blankets
- Run scenarios with these communities so they get a real sense of what emergencies look like
- Mandatory governance induction for committee members. Akin to AICD for company directors
- Case studies of those doing it well - I believe that a week before the Lacrosse fire in Docklands an evacuation drill was held
- Providing information that is culturally and linguistically appropriate

Communication

- Apps/comms portal for blgs/precinct
- Online group for the building tenants and owners (whatsapp etc)
- Treat apartments same as hotel - map and emergency procedures on back of door
- We need a centralised government communication platform that reaches all schemes across NSW (strata hub)

Strata literacy and awareness (across sectors)

- Raising awareness of the challenges on all sides and stakeholders from individuals to governments
- Develop Strata literacy program to understand the lay of the land - such a complex governance system
- Distributor education on implications for power outages

Community building

- Building based community connection activities
- Building design that promotes incidental interaction between residents and enables connectedness
- Making it fun! Engage people by helping people get to know each other - invite local businesses to support and sponsor
- Demonstrate the connection between close community and resilience in disasters
- Developing community connections and cohesion to support /enhance preparedness to recovery

Regulation

- Increase regulation to support, not punitive
- Review As3745 to address apartments
- Mandate emergency management plans

Tailored support services for strata

- Fund OCN to provide independent advice
- Where are the opportunities to move away from user pays and towards some shared services for apartments in a state or a municipality. Need support services that are not paid for by the residents.
- Templates for residents to help them complete their emergency management plans
- Leverage the services provided by metropolitan fire departments around identifying and recording vulnerable individuals in each building
- Where new regulation comes in, these OCs and communities need to be supported to complete these functions
- Committees try hard...and are too often criticised by keyboard warriors within their complex. We could help by sharing model guidance to reinforce their work
- A checklist would be good. Timely Reminders through Strata Hub

Governance

- Proactive discussion of risks at AGMs
- Standardisation of board roles (e.g. skills matrix)
- Every OC to have a top 10 risk register which is tabled and reviewed at every AGM
- Explore whether buildings should be able to appoint and pay professional committee members where they do not have the internal capability to manage the responsibilities of a working OC
- Identifying and supporting the most vulnerable members of the community

Insurance

- Reward investment into resilience design and retrofits via discounted insurance premiums and interest rates from banks
- Owners corporations need to maintain buildings beyond the "minimum standard" to achieve preferential insurance terms. Risks will typically fall into below average, average and above average. Only above average risks would expect to see premium discounts

Funding and investment

- Community grants for community connection in strata communities
- State gov investment to support risk management and emergency prep

Other

- Neighbourhood/precinct plans (building disasters impact buildings next door in the inner city)
- Public data on disaster risk / better sensor networks and communications
- Occupancy permit to include annual drill
- Infrastructure improvements that respond to risks (particularly consider heatwaves as its often overlooked)
- Better security of tenure for renters looks like it would help here!
- Aligning disaster resilience with sustainability investment, bringing investment together to develop multiple benefits
- Commission research to have evidence-based data to inform policy intervention

DISASTER RESPONSE ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Following is a verbatim summary of the issues and opportunities relevant to the **disaster or emergency response phase**, that were recorded during the Round Table discussions.

To help understand key themes, the issues and opportunities have been collated under subheadings.

Disaster Response Issues

Don't know who is in the building

- Unsure who in building may be vulnerable
- Language barriers - identifying who is your buildings
- List of who needs to be contacted and by whom
- The issues and challenges are similar to those that are faced by communities facing floods, bushfires etc
- How do you respond rapidly and accurately?
- Make sure we are thinking about all hazards - heat
- Tenants move so often - can't rely on them to be floor wardens etc

Communications

- The digital divide - how can telecommunications networks, digital infrastructure and services/ platforms be utilised but also consider digital inclusion, accessibility and knowledge/ awareness issues
- No register of buildings and managers - strata hub might do that now?

Lack of role clarity

- No-one knows who is in charge
- What can community members do? I.e. should we be telling them to evacuate as soon as possible, rather than checking on their neighbours
- Understand the level of risk - education for people living in apartments i.e. when should I help my neighbours when should I get out quickly?
- Local councils hold a lot of the responsibilities for emergency management - what is their role? These buildings are small communities
- Accepting the 'direction' provided by a neighbour
- Assumption that AUSGRID had been called - luckily they saw the fire

Diverse needs

- Mental health and socio economic factors - more difficult to evacuate
- People in low SES and other at-risk don't
- Fire services don't have power / rights when it comes to hoarding - how to handle/help
- People with a disability, not just physical access, people might not be able to hear alarms etc
- Buildings not developed for people with accessibility issues
- People with disability facing barriers such as physical accessibility issues, and communication barriers

Advice, expertise and guidance

- Need for experts - don't necessarily know who to call
- Limited guidance even if you do want to be prepared

Other

- Building codes/ regulation that require accessibility? (most not)
- Potential for first responders to face particular challenges
- No idea what to do when the emergency is over
- Understanding interdependencies in between all of our systems
- Community development approach - preparedness stage
- Ask the question - what happens if there is a fire in the building (when you move in)
- Getting the information to first responders
- Pets!
- Interdependencies - how something (process, service, utility, platform) breaking or can have negative downstream/flow on effects

Disaster Response Opportunities

Communication

- Add things into the Automatic Fire Alarm database so it will come up that there are tenants with special needs
- Strata hub - how can this help? Registering people who need help
- F2F communication TEAM - strata managers can help communicate, but needs collaboration: EMS, government
- Make sure you can explain why they can't access the building
- Building log / registrar - keep it near the fire panel need to be up to date
- Ensure there is a register of people who have a disability or need assistance in any way
- Providing information that is culturally and linguistically appropriate
- Evacuation management should include interim arrangements until Register Find Reunite is established. The use of the Disaster Victim Registration book (previously used by Police) would be ideal for this purpose
- Should people leave doors open so people know that they've been evacuated? Or is there some other system to indicate the unit is evacuated?

Education and guidance

- Peer learning and sharing (residents and suppliers)
- Awareness raising - what are the specific issues for people with a disability
- Annual fire inspections/ safety statement should include info about tenants with specific need/ assistance
- Enable strata schemes to invest money in social events and training
- Induction for owners (through settlement) and tenants (through signing the lease) - could be short
- How to prepare: nbn and emergency events

Community supporting community

- > Residents organise themselves once they evacuated, then support each other with information/emotional needs (one person will go speak with the emergency professionals)? No need to nominate a floor warden, because it is difficult to keep track of current residents.
- > What role for residents to organise themselves?
- > Anything residents can do?

Funding and investment

- Access to \$ from council for block parties with a purpose as a means of creating buy-in

Other

- Involve people with a disability in the development of the emergency management plans (inclusive disaster planning)
- Harmonisation across jurisdictions. Have one platform or system that can be used for all

RECOVERY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Following is a verbatim summary of the issues and opportunities relevant to the recovery phase, that were recorded during the Round Table discussions.

To help understand key themes, the issues and opportunities have been collated under subheadings.

Recovery Issues

Insurance

- Confusion about insurance inclusions
- Tenants not having insurance to cover relocation
- In a case like Surry hills. Multiple insurance companies. Multiple brokers. Multiple strata managers. Needs a level of co ordination

Communications, education and guidance

- Education of stakeholders on roles and responsibilities
- Communicating with all residents - owner occupiers, owner investors and tenants
- How to contact residents
- Heatwaves can we stay in buildings?

Over work and competing issues

- Competing interests
- Conflicting agendas of owners

Funding and support

- Gov support related to type of event not necessarily scale of impact - car park example
- No funding for strata sector directly
- Govt aid not often accessible to strata owners (because of insurance)
- Govt blind to strata - single home dwellings only
- Legal Aid not accessible to strata owners

Lack of role clarity

- Who is the co-ordinator
- Coordinated response will take time

Accommodation

- Finding suitable emergency accommodation
- Big event Govt has emerg accommodation, not for small events
- Identify all stakeholders - caravan and camping - accommodation

The complexity of strata

- Complex relationships
- Lots of stakeholders
- Co-ordination of essential services to buildings when trying to recover from a disaster event
- Not enough experienced people in this space who understand strata

Lack of understanding

- People greatly underestimate their risks/impacts across all hazards, particularly in cities
- No understanding of how building works

Other

- Social housing protocols v OC's - all live together
- Identification of issues of importance to people in medium to high density housing as these will inform DM recovery plans

Recovery Opportunities

Education and guidance

- Real estate requirement to inform tenants about the weather risks/impacts that are possible when people move in
- Landlords education w.r.t duty to tenants around Emergency Prep
- Providing information that is culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Identify how to reduce risk

Community building

- Social connection opportunities following the crisis to strengthen community and provide peer-to-peer support

Tailored support services for strata

- Support for owners, residents and OC committee to navigate insurance processes

Strata literacy

- Training for emergency services, insurers, etc in how strata works

Insurance

- Insurers to play a role in "rewarding" buildings for plans

Cross sector collaboration

- One network joining all stakeholders
- Initiate planning workshops with all stakeholders to identify strengths and gaps in central, community and personal capability to support recovery (probably across a range of hazards)
- National approach - disasters don't know borders
- System solutions - across sectors required
- Mindset change at all level of government to recognise strata
- One network joining all stakeholders

Other

- Design of building needs to include emerging disasters - heatwave
- Technology solutions
- Effective measures when Essential Safety Measures are compromised by residents

"We've just been hit with a MASSIVE fire order, that expects us to retrofit sprinklers to every apartment in a building over 40 years old!"

"Getting residents, both owners and tenants, to actively participate in anything (e.g, fire safety drills) is impossible."

"No electrical power at all for 3 days. Residents depended on friends and neighbours to have access to fridges and freezers and on neighbours to access gas cooking facilities and emergency lighting."

"There are so many other priorities, and so any emergency planning is low on our list of priorities."

"I thought our building managers may have been across emergency protocols but unfortunately they are not."

"Some residents trapped in lifts for couple of hours until lift company could free them."

"It's bad enough trying to keep up with reactive stuff as volunteers, being proactive is another level. We will need to leave full time employment."

Quotes from OCN National Survey 2023

