



# Review of NSW Strata and Community Scheme Laws Submission by the Healthy Built Environments Program

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Never Stand Still

Faculty of Built Environment

Healthy Built Environments Program



THE HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENTS PROGRAM

The Healthy Built Environments Program (HBEP) is an innovative interdisciplinary collaboration that brings the built environment and health together. The Program is situated in the City Futures Research Centre, Faculty of the Built Environment at the University of NSW (UNSW). Core funding for the Program comes from NSW Health. Read more on our web site: <http://www.be.unsw.edu.au/programmes/healthy-built-environments-program/about>

We appreciate the opportunity to make a submission to NSW Government's review of strata and community scheme laws. We are particularly interested in how strata living can enhance individual health while respecting the needs of the broader community in close residential living.

Pets can contribute positively to the health and wellbeing of their owners. Lack of physical activity and social isolation are modifiable risk factors in the reduction of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, some cancers, obesity and depression. Pets address these risk factors in that they provide opportunities for recreation and socialisation by encouraging people to enjoy the outdoors and by stimulating conversations between strangers. They improve feelings of safety, can reduce stress, and provide much-needed companionship. The health benefits of pet ownership are experienced across all age groups, including children and the elderly.

The number of people living in higher density housing is increasing. This impacts pet ownership in two ways. First, there is evidence that people living in higher density housing are actually more likely to experience feelings of isolation and stress and therefore are more likely to benefit from pet ownership. Second, owning a pet in higher density housing can be complex and needs to be carefully managed. The benefits that pet owners derive from their pets should not be at the expense of non-pet owning residents and a balance needs to be achieved.

Despite the many documented benefits of pet ownership, under current NSW strata laws Model By-Law 16 exists to allow blanket restrictions to be placed on residents in strata properties. This means that residents in housing managed under NSW strata laws can be prevented from owning a pet. This kind of 'blanket' restriction not only removes the benefits of responsible pet ownership, it also removes resident's sense of autonomy to effect their surroundings – such disempowerment further contributes to feelings of isolation and stress.

The Australian Capital Territory has a similar by-law to Model By-law 16 which also states that consent to keep an animal can be given with or without conditions, however there is a further requirement that an owners corporation cannot amend its by-laws to preclude any right of any unit owner to keep an animal. In other words, they must not introduce a blanket "no pets" by-law. We consider that a similar law should be applied in NSW.

Literature to support our submission can be found in a recent comprehensive scholarly literature review undertaken by the HBEP (Kent, J., Thompson, S. M. & Jalaludin, B. B. 2011. Healthy Built Environments: A review of the literature. Sydney: Healthy Built Environments Program, City Futures Research Centre, UNSW). This can be downloaded from our web site: <http://www.be.unsw.edu.au/programs/healthy-built-environments-program/literature-review>



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