**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**Designing for a stronger community and healthier city with vertical villages**

A new Research Report seeks to answer the question ‘How do we create socially connected communities in high rise developments which enhance community wellbeing?’

It calls for urban designers and placemakers, architects, planners, developers, State Government, and council bodies to re-examine the way they build high-rise dwellings to enhance resident wellbeing.

*Vertical Villages: Community, Place and Urban Density Pilot*, a Report developed in partnership with Macquarie University, Faith Housing Alliance (supported by a grant from the Salvation Army) and BaptistCare, outlines key considerations and improvements to resident experiences that will help to promote overall wellbeing and community connection in cities.

The Report will be formally launched at an event on Monday 4 April 2022 at Macquarie University, Arts Function Centre by the Hon. Rose Jackson MLC, Shadow Minister for Water, Housing and Homelessness.

Ms Jackson said it is well known that NSW is facing a housing crisis, and more needs to be done to facilitate not just bricks and mortar for those in need, but also a sense of community.

“Sydney is one of the least affordable cities to live in globally and regional NSW has seen staggering increases in house and rental prices in recent years. Political leaders have an obligation to deal with these issues with urgency, and to engage with non-government organisations and community groups who are actively proposing creative solutions,” said Ms Jackson.

“We know that housing is about more than just bricks and mortar – it’s about a home, a community where people feel safe, comfortable and welcome. This report is an essential part of that story, providing research to demonstrate the importance of investment in building not just houses, but communities and housing designed for connection and well-being.

“I look forward to working with the Faith Housing Alliance to further explore and promote these ideas.”

Report author and lead researcher on the project from the Macquarie School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University, Dr. Miriam Williams, said that with 1 in 10 people living in apartments and the increasing densification of major cities, it is important to continually re-assess and evaluate the best ways to design high-rise with community connection in mind.

“It’s no surprise that many people living in cities feel a sense of isolation. Our study has been further proof of this point,” Dr Williams said.

“The Vertical Villages Report aims to encourage governments and developers to see high rise apartment developments as more than transitional forms of housing and continue to promote design principles that support residents to live well in high rise. We need to invest in building smarter, healthier, and attractive vertical villages with sufficient green space and social infrastructure provided to enhance community wellbeing and as an affordable solution for the long-term.

“Faith-based organisations and the social housing sector play a key role as housing providers and in community development. There is ongoing potential for non-government organisations, government, and faith-based groups to adopt asset-based community development approaches and place-making activities to work with the diverse skills
and capabilities of individuals, groups of people, or places, to make thriving vertical villages. That’s what our report and toolkit look at in detail.”

The *Vertical Villages* Reporthas compiled the findings of this study, which involved an online questionnaire and 25 semi-structured interviews with residents of high-rise apartments across five suburbs of Sydney and 16 interviews with expert urban designers, place makers, and community developers offering insights from their experience and practice.

Faith Housing Alliance Chief Executive Officer, Rose Thomson said that the collaboration on this Report is an important step to facilitating stronger connections between urban planners and the role of community housing organisations when it comes to social and affordable housing development.

“These efforts must be supported by an inter-departmental approach by State Government, appropriate funding and a national housing plan, as our nation’s housing crisis continues to escalate,” Ms Thomson said.

A full list of the recommendations resulting from the analysis can be found on page 10 of the attached report.

Registrations to the launch event are now open, with the option to attend either physically or online.

Media are invited to attend the event and asked to RSVP [here](https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/iHlBCXLW6DiEjDz4C6xr1t?domain=share.hsforms.com).

**Key findings from the report include:**

**Experts**

* Urban design experts identified the importance of authentic community engagement that is sensitive to language diversity.
* Designing for diversity requires consultation, variation, and flexibility.
* Designing for community connection and wellbeing requires provisioning and programming communal spaces.
* Programming shared spaces and designing flexible communal spaces can assist in resident use and neighbour connection through particular activities e.g. pot-luck, bike workshops or community rooms.
* Existing design policy constrains innovative apartment design.
* Community developers should approach cultural and language diversity as an asset to community building, while acknowledging the divisions that could exist.
* Commitment and motivation were concerns for community development workers embedded in specific places and communities.
* FBOs as actors are uniquely positioned for urban redevelopment.

**Residents**

* Participants were mostly satisfied with shared spaces even if they considered them not entirely fit for purpose.
* Most participants described limited interaction with neighbours but were interested in changing that.
* Participants were generally positive about the forms of social mix they observed in their apartment building or complex (age and life stage, cultural and linguistic diversity, private rental, and ownership) but were more sceptical about the prospect of combing public and private tenure.
* Participants were wary but open to the role of FBOs in fostering connection and building community.
* Participants were able to shelter at and work from home during the pandemic, though almost half felt more lonely.

***- ENDS -***

*IMAGE |*

***For further information and to request interview opportunities, please contact:***

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**Macquarie University**

Macquarie University was established in 1964 as a bold experiment in higher education. Built to break from traditions and work in tandem with industry, we strive for the extraordinary by challenging convention and embracing different views.

Led by our academics and researchers, we continue our pioneering approach – from inventing [Wi-Fi with the CSIRO](https://www.mq.edu.au/research/research-expertise/Research-innovation/where-wi-fi-began), to enhancing graduate employability through [personalised degrees](https://www.mq.edu.au/study/you-to-the-power-of-us/personalised-degrees)and [degrees co-designed with industry](https://www.mq.edu.au/?a=983910).

<https://www.mq.edu.au/>

**Faith Housing Alliance** [formerly *Churches Housing Inc]*

*Working together for the provision of social and affordable housing*

Faith Housing Alliance (FHA) is a NSW Social Sector peak body representing the faith sector who build and/or manage social, emergency, transition, disability, and affordable housing to reduce homelessness and develop strong, resilient communities.

Today, our membership includes faith-based organisations derived from a significant range of Christian denominations and other faith groups, families and individuals who offer community housing, are registering for such, who work in the housing sector or in professions or philanthropic support related to it.

The value and role of the faith sector in the provision of thousands upon thousands of homes it has delivered over the years, and the wrap-round care services it offers its tenants and housing communities cannot be understated.

<https://churcheshousing.org.au/>

**BaptistCare**

BaptistCare is a leading not-for-profit Christian based care organisation that has been serving the aged and people living with disadvantage for 75 years.

We support thousands of people across NSW and the ACT through more than 160 facilities and programs. From humble beginnings in 1944, BaptistCare has grown into one of the nation's most respected care providers, employing more than 3,500 staff, with a further 1,000 volunteers.

<https://baptistcare.org.au/>

**Salvation Army**

The Salvation Army Australia is an international Christian movement, united by faith and giving hope where it’s needed most. Across Australia – in cities, country towns and rural communities – our work touches every demographic and age group. We’re involved in national issues while also bringing hope to people who may be experiencing hardship or injustice.

Since our foundations in nineteenth century London, we express our faith in charitable work to provide both the spiritual and the social support. We believe that with one hand we reach out to God and with the other we reach out to the world.

As both a church and charity, we can preach and speak about justice, compassion, and other issues that support the welfare of others and see them as a whole person – body, mind and spirit.

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/about-us/>