

# HIGHLIGHTING GOOD APARTMENT DESIGN FOR HEALTH

THE HIGH LIFE

The combination of apartment design features important for positive mental wellbeing

## SOLAR & DAYLIGHT & NATURAL VENTILATION

- ✓ North facing and dual aspect apartments.
- ✓ Bedrooms and living areas are located on external walls.
- ✓ Living room window area is  $\geq 10\%$  of the floor area.

## ACOUSTIC & VISUAL PRIVACY

- ✓ Bedrooms and living areas are separated from building circulation corridors and common areas.
- ✓ Bedrooms are not directly accessible from the living area.
- ✓ Buildings are setback  $\geq 3\text{m}$  from the street.
- ✓ Balconies are setback  $\geq 6\text{m}$  from the adjacent site.

## INDOOR SPACE

- ✓ Apartment internal floor areas are at least  $\geq 35\text{m}^2$  for studios;  $\geq 47\text{m}^2$  for 1-bedroom;  $\geq 67\text{m}^2$  for 2-bedroom;  $\geq 90\text{m}^2$  for 3-bedroom; and  $\geq 102\text{m}^2$  for 4-bedroom apartments (excluding area of a 2nd bathroom).
- ✓ Bedroom minimum areas are at least  $\geq 10\text{m}^2$  for master bedrooms and  $\geq 9\text{m}^2$  for secondary bedrooms, with minimum width/depth dimensions of  $\geq 3\text{m}$ .
- ✓ Provide external storage areas.

## APARTMENT MIX

- ✓ Provide a variety of apartment types with different numbers of bedrooms.

## PRIVATE OUTDOOR SPACE

- ✓ Balcony areas are at least  $\geq 4\text{m}^2$  for studios;  $\geq 8\text{m}^2$  for 1-bedroom;  $\geq 10\text{m}^2$  for 2-bedroom; and  $\geq 12\text{m}^2$  for 3-bedroom apartments. Courtyard areas are at least  $\geq 15\text{m}^2$ .
- ✓ Balcony and courtyard depths are at least  $\geq 1.8\text{m}$  for studios or 1-bedroom;  $\geq 2\text{m}$  for 2-bedroom; and  $\geq 2.4\text{m}$  for 3+ bedroom apartments.
- ✓ Balcony depths are less than widths (i.e., long side faces outwards).

## CIRCULATION SPACE

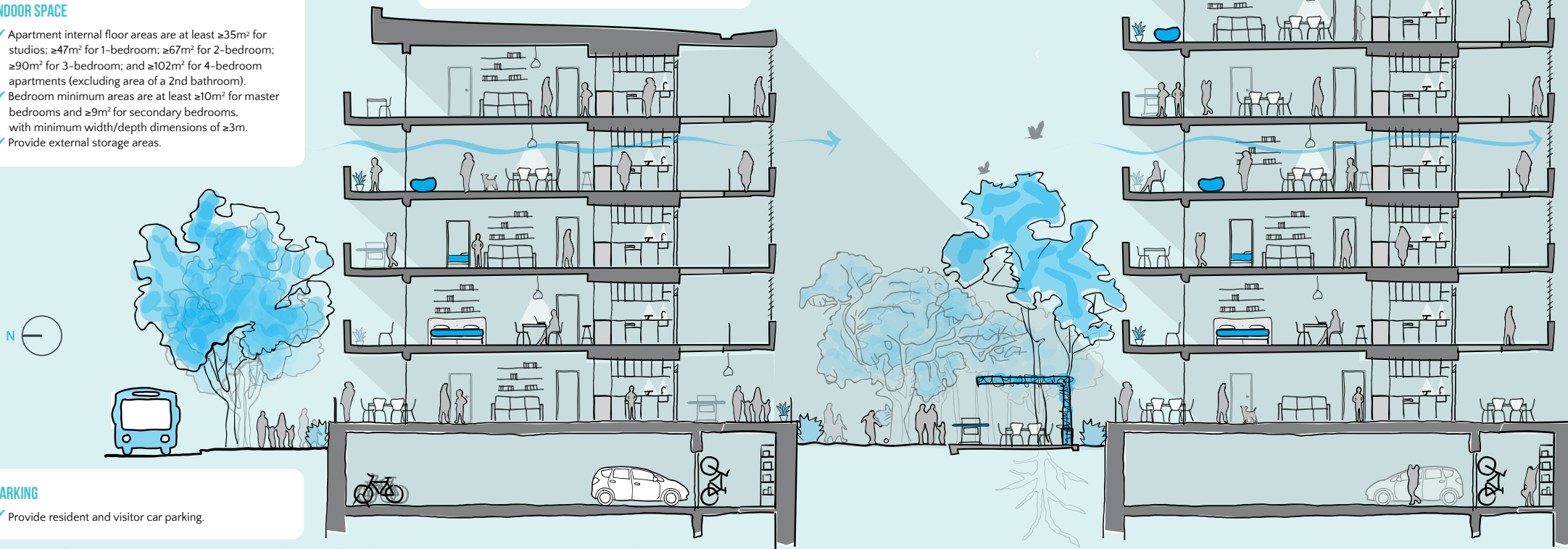
- ✓ Circulation corridors are at least  $\geq 1.5\text{m}$  wide.
- ✓ Limit the number of apartments per floor, ideally to  $\leq 8$  and no more than 12.

## COMMUNAL OPEN SPACE

- ✓ Provide open (outdoor) communal spaces.
- ✓ Maximise dimensions to ensure the usability of the space.
- ✓ Maximise grassed areas and limit hardscaping.

## BUILDING TYPE

- ✓ Smaller scale apartment complexes with fewer buildings, storeys and apartments.



## PARKING

- ✓ Provide resident and visitor car parking.

# THE HIGH LIFE STUDY WAS ESTABLISHED TO INVESTIGATE THE IMPACT OF AUSTRALIAN APARTMENT DESIGN POLICIES ON THE HEALTH & WELLBEING OF APARTMENT RESIDENTS.

## THE POLICIES:

The state-level apartment design policies were:



**NSW:**  
State Environmental  
Planning Policy 65  
(SEPP65)  
legislated 2002



**WA:**  
State Planning Policy 7.3,  
Volume 2 – Apartments  
(SPP7.3)  
legislated 2019



**VIC:**  
Better Apartments  
Design Standards  
(BADS)  
legislated 2017  
and updated 2021

## THE BUILDINGS:

We measured apartment buildings (constructed 2006–2016) for their implementation of policy requirements with a plausible relationship to health:



## THE RESIDENTS:

Residents were invited to complete a survey on apartment design and their health & wellbeing:



**1326**  
RESIDENTS COMPLETED  
THE SURVEY  
(14% RESPONSE RATE)

## THE FINDINGS:

Focusing on 80 design requirements relevant to all apartments and buildings, we ran a cluster analysis which grouped the buildings based on the combination, or mix, of design requirements that had been implemented and investigated how this impacted residents' mental wellbeing.

### 2 DISTINCT GROUPS EMERGED:



**HIGH POLICY PERFORMANCE BUILDINGS,  
WITH GREATER IMPLEMENTATION OF  
51 DESIGN REQUIREMENTS**



**LOW POLICY PERFORMANCE BUILDINGS, WITH  
SIGNIFICANTLY POORER IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE DESIGN REQUIREMENTS**

Residents in High Policy Performance Buildings had significantly better mental wellbeing (on average, by +1.96 points).

In other words, when implemented in combination, the design requirements summarised in the infographic were positively associated with good mental wellbeing.

**THESE DESIGN REQUIREMENTS SHOULD BE PRIORITISED IN  
BUILDING DESIGN AND APPROVAL PROCESSES TO PROMOTE  
OPTIMAL RESIDENT MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES.**