

Designing student housing to manage spread of Covid-19, future pandemics

As university students return to campus in a strictly controlled and phased approach, those living in on-campus accommodation will have to adhere to strict hygiene and social distancing measures.

According to Sean Kenealy, director at STAG African, this is only a short-term solution. Moving forward, the design of student accommodation will need to account for the certainty of similar pandemics in the future. “Well-designed accommodation could be key to managing the spread Covid-19 among South Africa’s student population. On-campus housing provides a controlled environment, where universities can ensure hygiene and safety protocols are adhered to,” says Kenealy.

Traditionally, student housing in South Africa has been geared towards accommodating as many students as possible in dense, dormitory-style housing. “A single Covid-19 infection under such conditions could yield an uncontrolled outbreak within weeks, if not days. We need to implement ways of limiting social interaction, without losing the vitally important aspect of community,” says Kenealy.

HOW COVID-19 WILL AFFECT STUDENT HOUSING

Student accommodation group, STAG African has engineered a patent pod design that limits personal interactions to just eight people.



THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The individual is 1 of 200 students.



THE WALKWAY

The individual is 1 of 32 students.



THE HOME

The individual is 1 of 8 students.



THE ROOM

1 or 2 students.

Communal living

STAG African has engineered a patent pod design that replicates a home environment, with eight students per pod. Students occupy double or single bedrooms and share a common cooking and living area, allowing for the management of traffic and limiting personal interactions to eight people.

Communal living is also conducive to student success. “Over 60% of learning at the tertiary level occurs outside of a lecture hall, within the communities we create on campus – this is known as the hidden context of learning. Communal spaces are where mentorship and tutorship happen. Alternative education is as important as formal education,” says Kenealy.

South Africa is already experiencing a student housing crisis, and a big part of this is not just a lack of beds, but also a lack of innovation. The current pandemic, and the possibility of future pandemics, could be the driver for new approaches to how we build student housing, says Kenealy: “We have an opportunity now to pause and redefine the meaning of quality on-campus accommodation; this should take into account community, sustainability and affordability.”

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