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Protect, Insure and Care

The work of Safety, Return to Work and Support impacts more than seven million people on a day-to-day basis in New South Wales.

Images by Scott Ehler

Safety, Return to Work and Support (SRWS) is a government organisation bringing together a number of commercial and regulatory agencies, the largest being WorkCover, which oversees work health and safety, and is the predominant workers compensation insurer for businesses across the state. Other agencies include the Motor Accidents Authority, which regulates the compulsory third-party insurance scheme for motor vehicles; the Workers' Compensation Dust Diseases Board, which provides compensation, treatment, and support for workers and their families who have had work-related exposure to harmful dust in New South Wales; and the Lifetime Care and Support

Authority, which is responsible for the treatment, rehabilitation, and care of people severely injured on New South Wales roads. The organisation oversees assets of more than \$21 billion and insures more than three million people.

Vivek Bhatia was appointed CEO of SRWS in August 2014, bringing to the role many years of strong private-sector insurance and business transformation experience. When Vivek took on his first public-sector leadership role, WorkCover was the subject of several parliamentary inquiries and in need of an overhaul of its processes and culture to better meet the needs of the New South Wales community. One of his key challenges has been to drive change and create a more open and transparent workplace at

WorkCover and the other agencies within SRWS.

The CEO Magazine had a conversation with Vivek about his exciting new role of creating a positive and productive workplace, and the challenges of moving towards a more customer-centric focus.

***The CEO Magazine:* How important is SRWS's role in the New South Wales community?**

Vivek: The role of SRWS is a critical one because of the breadth of the organisation: we touch the lives of every single individual in New South Wales in one way or another. For the seven-million-plus people who live in New South Wales, when they're on the road or when they're at work, we're >



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hopefully positively impacting their lives on a day-to-day basis. And we do that across what we call the ‘care spectrum’. That is, we protect, we insure, and we care.

In the protection area, as the work health and safety regulator, we ensure that all employers in New South Wales are focused on work health and safety as a core responsibility of being an employer. When safety standards slip, we take action as an enforcement directorate. We have more than 300 inspectors who work within our inspectorate in work health and safety, who ensure there is not only compliance but that there is an advisory side which helps in defining what ‘good’ looks like. We believe that safe business is good business, and we focus on harm prevention.

WorkCover insurance is a large insurance company in its own right covering workers compensation insurance for more than three million workers across about 300,000 employers within New South Wales. To give you a rough size, we have about \$15 billion in assets for that insurance company, making it one of the largest insurers in the country.

Within care, we look at lifetime care, which I describe as a scheme for people who are most catastrophically injured on the roads. There are almost 1,000

participants in the scheme currently, and about 140 get added on a per annum basis that we look after for life. Within that scheme, we have about \$4 billion of assets that we manage to ensure we can look after those people for life. Through the Workers’ Compensation Dust Diseases Board, we care for 4,000 participants and family members and manage \$1 billion in assets so that we can support them and their families.

Tell us about your professional background prior to becoming CEO of SRWS.

I joined SRWS in August last year. Before this role, I was with McKinsey & Company, which is the preeminent consulting company in the world. I was the co-leader for their business turnaround and restructuring practice across the Asia-Pacific. I was with McKinsey for two years. Before that, I was CEO of Wesfarmers Insurance—including Lumley, WFL, and Coles Insurance—for four years. I have brought to this role a combination of my transformation and change experience, and also my deep expertise in the insurance sector.

What have been some of the highlights during that time?

During this time we have embarked upon a radical transformation of its agenda, focusing on the operational

and cultural aspects of the organisation. When I commenced in my role, we had a parliamentary inquiry into some of our practices and the culture of the organisation. We have taken a very strong view of what we believe and define as the culture that we want to have in the organisation.

We have very clearly embarked on that journey. From a cultural standpoint, I have taken the position of being open and accessible to every person regardless of organisational hierarchy, because where I come from everyone in the organisation has an important role to play. There should be an open and transparent environment within every organisation with empowerment to do your best in your role.

Your mantra is ‘commercial mind, social heart’. Can you elaborate on that?

This is something very close to me, and one of the things I introduced when I first took on my role: to explain the real focus of our organisation and how we should go about delivering it. We have defined what the core vision of our organisation is: we believe that you should be safe and supported, and that applies to everything we do. For us to be able to deliver the range of responsibilities we have, we must do so through a commercial mind and with a social heart. Being commercial does not take away what we are here to do, which is to deliver a very strong social outcome, but it is important for us to do well so we can do good. It is a balance we continuously aspire to achieve. It’s not an ‘either or’ proposition; it’s most definitely both!

How does the business instil the culture and mantra in staff?

From an organisational standpoint, we are very focused on better understanding that mantra. ‘Commercial mind, social heart’ is true for every person who comes to work within our organisation. We need to constantly challenge the way we do things and find a >

1 thing that matters, a partner you can trust.



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way to improve. That is actually being commercial. Commercial doesn't mean dollars; it means a mindset of how I can do things better. And the social purpose of why we are here is to make sure people are safe and supported; that social purpose doesn't go away. In fact, the social side benefits from the commercial mindset. Our people have started to translate that into their day-to-day lives and their individual roles, so it has now become part and parcel of how we do things here. It's started to become part of the language, of explaining things to people who join the organisation. And it has become part of our criteria for hiring people because we want to hire people who have that strong sense of focus of delivering sustainable positive outcomes for our key stakeholders.

How does the business partner with other groups to achieve success?

Our operating style works on a partnership model. As for lifetime care, we work with providers to deliver the care on our behalf. When it comes to our workers compensation business, we work with other insurance companies who act as agents on our behalf. We work with various other partners such as industry associations when it comes to our work health and safety regulations to be able to deliver strong messages, education, awareness, and key headlines. So, for example, we work closely with the New South Wales Farmers' Federation and the Master Builders Association. We work very strongly with them to deliver messages to their membership base because we see some of those areas as being high risk when it comes to safety. We are increasingly starting to work with organisations such as beyondblue to look at mental health issues and the impact they can have on workplaces, exploring how we can make sure we contribute but also have a partnership role in detection and early intervention. We want to have more open and honest conversations about mental health.



What challenges have you faced since you became CEO?

SRWS is a diverse organisation and highly visible in the community, and we have a huge obligation and responsibility to constantly deliver improved services, from an insurance and care perspective and also from a regulatory standpoint. There is always a challenge to ensure that we are focused on the right things, that we do things very well, and, most importantly as an organisation, that we constantly strive to put customers at the centre of everything we do. For us, that's a journey we have embarked upon. Our challenge has been to constantly put ourselves in the shoes of the beneficiary or the customer and then redesign how we would deliver our services.

We have our constant challenges. Culture doesn't change overnight, and I'm the first to acknowledge that. Culture really defines an organisation. People talk a lot about strategy, but culture is strategy that affects you every day. We're really working towards embedding a customer-centric culture in the organisation. Lots of organisations in the commercial space struggle to find that fire in their belly and the passion and the sense of purpose that aligns with it. We do have that, so our role is to harness the energy and funnel it for the betterment of what we are here to do, which is to deliver value to

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our stakeholders and the community of New South Wales.

Looking forward, what is the vision for the future of the organisation?

From the SRWS perspective, we just had a two-day strategy and planning meeting offsite with our top 50 leaders. We are in the middle of defining what the next 18 months look like. What I can say is that we are looking to take a quantum leap ahead in terms of the operational, financial, and cultural transformation of the organisation with a view to making sure we are a sustainable organisation which can deliver on our social objectives. So that's how we have defined our roadmap for the next 18 months. Everybody signed up to it, and we do have an awesome and amazing journey ahead of us. We have a lot of experiences and skills to build upon, some of which we have gained in the past few years.

We have a very supportive board, chaired by Michael Carapiet, and our minister, the Honourable Dominic Perrottet who is very engaged in the work we do and is enthusiastic about the journey ahead to deliver world-class services to our stakeholders across New South Wales.

As a team, we are committed to moving forward and delivering on our goal of being an international leader in what we do—protect, insure, and care. •



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