

# CommInsure improvement still a work in progress

■ Sean Smith



Commonwealth Bank boss Ian Narev made all the right noises when he admitted to shortcomings around the handling of claims by sick and dying policyholders insured by the CommInsure business.

Insurers, he said nine weeks ago, had a responsibility to deal with claimants “as sensitively, as quickly and as fairly as possible”.

In several cases where CommInsure was alleged to

have engaged in unethical and fraudulent behaviour to avoid paying out, it had “focused too much on process rather than people”.

“We got the balance wrong. We focused on details at critical times for customers that needed help,” Narev said.

Only time will tell whether changes made by CommInsure on the back of allegations by a Fairfax Media/Four Corners investigation translate into more responsive assessment practices.

However, if the case of Paul Lawson is any indication, CommInsure remains a work in progress. As detailed by

*WestBusiness* in mid-March, the Parmelia father was diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis three years ago.

Forced out of the workplace by his illness in March 2015, he was certified by a vascular surgeon the following month as permanently incapacitated for the purposes of a claim on his total and permanent disability insurance.

Lawson’s lawyer, David Huggins, says the former sales manager qualified for a \$774,000 TPD payout last July under his insurance policy.

Ten months later, however, Lawson is still waiting for CommInsure to decide on his

claim. The drawn-out process has left him and his family in financial hardship.

On April 29, CommInsure notified Huggins that it was now waiting on information about surgery in December before deciding on the claim.

A spokesman yesterday said the group was “always concerned when we hear of customers’ concerns about their claims experience”.

“TPD claims are often some of the most complex claims to assess,” he said.

“Our claims processes are designed to ensure we obtain all the relevant information to make a decision on a

customer’s claim — upfront and in a timely manner — and may include consideration of medical treatment and its impact on a customer’s wellbeing.”

Mr Lawson’s claim had been accelerated, with a decision due “very soon”, he said.

There is no suggestion of any wrongdoing around the assessment.

Simply, as Narev has said, while “thoroughness is important for the integrity of the system, this must be balanced by customer need and dignity”.

✉ [sean.smith@wanews.com.au](mailto:sean.smith@wanews.com.au)