

Workers' compensation insurance is an important cornerstone in Ohio's economy. It not only ensures Ohioans injured on the job get healthy and back to work, but also protects businesses from costly workplace incidents. With these benefits in mind, I've focused during my last five years as the leader of the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) on forming partnerships with all of our customers, who at times have contrasting views but all strive to maintain a system that is financially strong, does not impose a barrier to economic growth and is dedicated to caring for Ohio's workers.

We've taken our lead from Governor John Kasich, who made turning Ohio's workers' compensation system into a partner for economic growth and a leader in workplace safety a priority when he took office in 2011. Under his leadership, BWC has established a goal of becoming a world class workers' compensation carrier, and we're taking steps in the right direction.

Overall, employers are paying less, and their once unpredictable rates have been stabilized. Private employer average base rates are 21.4 percent lower than those in effect at the beginning of 2011, and public employers' rates are down an overall 26.5 percent over that time period. A nationwide study of workers' compensation rates placed Ohio 17th lowest among all 50 states. Ohio ranked third highest in the nation as recently as 2008.

Employers also now have more flexibility and are better able to plan for paying those premiums following our conversion to prospective billing. This was a long overdue upgrade that brought Ohio in line with the industry standard of collecting premiums before extending coverage. Due to our strong financial position, BWC is providing a \$1.2 billion premium credit to employers to ease the billing system transition.

Additional improvements in 2015 included common-sense modifications to coverage requirements and options that were standing in the way of business growth. A much-needed law change proposed by BWC removed the requirement that nonprofits have coverage for their volunteer corporate officers, freeing up money for these organizations to provide services that help local communities throughout the state. Separately, a new coverage option will simplify workers' comp for businesses with employees who are injured in other states, making it easier for them to expand across the border and still make sure their employees are protected

We know improving the system involves much more than dollar savings for employers. Ohio workers deserve safe workplaces. That's why BWC is also investing in their health and safety. This year we awarded \$15 million in Safety Intervention grants at a record pace, helping more than 570 employers purchase equipment to improve safety in their workplace.

The enormous success of the safety grant program and Ohio employers' commitment to safety are a few likely factors in record-low workplace injury claims. Over the past five years, we have seen our injury claims drop more than 10 percent, from 105,000 to 94,000. With these decreases, the Bureau of Labor and Statistics places Ohio's injury rate below the national

average. Ohio stands at 2.9 injuries per 100 workers, compared to a national average of 3.4 injuries per 100 workers and is lower than all its neighboring states.

We want to keep that momentum going with additional investments in safety, including the Occupational Safety and Health Research Program, which is funding research into occupational safety and health research. Six Ohio universities are currently conducting research with \$2 million already awarded by BWC, and we plan to award an addition \$1 million in early 2016. We are excited to support research that could shift thinking on current workplace safety practices in Ohio and across the country.

We're also working to reduce delays in the treatment when someone is injured on the job. We've begun pilot programs to better coordinate care for knee and spine injuries. Our pharmacy management program is resulting in better care and has helped decrease opioid doses by 37 percent since 2010, helping ensure injured workers don't fall prey to addiction or overdose.

Ohio's workers comp system is unquestionably better today than it was five years ago, as evidenced by lower rates, safer workplaces and fewer claims. Yet, we know there are opportunities for greater successes on the horizon. I am optimistic that the partnerships that made each success possible will continue creating an even stronger collaborative atmosphere for thoughtful assessments of where more improvements can be made.

Steve Buehrer, Administrator/CEO
Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation