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Mind Medicine Australia welcomes consideration of changes to allow psychedelic therapy in the ACT

Mind Medicine Australia has welcomed consideration by the ACT Health Minister, Rachel Stephen-Smith, and the ACT Mental Health Minister, Emma Davidson, of legislative changes to allow psychedelic therapy in the ACT to treat mental illness.

Mind Medicine Australia's Canberra chapter leader, Tony Shields, said Mind Medicine Australia has had productive discussions with the offices of both Ministers recently and they had agreed to consider changes to ACT legislation to allow MDMA-assisted therapy to treat post-traumatic stress disorder ("PTSD") and psilocybin-assisted therapy to treat depression. Currently the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) can approve the use of these therapies, under its Special Access Scheme, for individual treatment-resistant patients to be treated by approved medical practitioners. However, a "Catch 22" between federal and ACT legislation means that it is illegal for practitioners to actually do that treatment in the ACT because of ACT legislative restrictions.

Mr Shields said, *"The Special Access Scheme is a compassionate and sensible scheme that recognises treatment-resistant patients have reached the end of the line using mainstream treatments and are severely suffering and at severe risk of self-harm. There are now ACT medical practitioners trained in psychedelic therapy willing to treat ACT patients and it seems cruel to deny these patients treatment when it has been approved for the individual patient by the TGA."*

"Nothing would happen that hasn't already been approved by the TGA so it is a quite conservative move", added Mr Shields

Overseas trials have found that using MDMA-assisted therapy to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and psilocybin-assisted therapy to treat depression and have produced results that are remarkably better than existing treatments. Around the world nine universities have set up centres of excellence to study psychedelic therapy including at Monash, John Hopkins, UCLA, Imperial College, London and Harvard.

The treatments only require 2-3 sessions with the medicines as part of psychotherapy in medically controlled environments and have been shown to be safe and non-addictive when used in this setting. The patients do not take the medicines away from the clinic or hospital.

Mr Shields said the ACT had shown itself to be a jurisdiction that looks at the facts rather than ideology. *"The ACT is moving to decriminalise personal amounts of illicit drugs including MDMA and psilocybin. It will be somewhat contradictory if this happens and we can't allow patients who have been approved by the TGA to be treated. While MDMA and psilocybin are already relatively safe compared to other illicit drugs when used recreationally, they are very safe when used in clinical settings. Amongst other things, the*



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substances in clinical settings are unadulterated, the dosing levels are controlled, patients can't take the substances home and patients are screened."

Although psilocybin and MDMA aren't mainstream treatments yet a number of countries have recognised their potential and allow treatment for treatment-resistant patients on a case by case basis including Canada, Switzerland, Israel and the US. The TGA's Special Access Scheme replicates what these countries have done but the 'Catch 22' in the ACT legislation stops it from actually occurring. In the US, Iraqi and Afghanistan war veterans suffering from PTSD have had very beneficial outcomes in trials using psychedelic assisted therapies.

Canberra is the home of many war veterans who are suffering from PTSD and depression. Every day these people suffer and their families face the risk of them self-harming. Clearing up this Catch-22 in the legislation would give them a chance to reduce that suffering.

Mr Shields said apart from positive feedback from the Health and Mental Health Ministers it had also received positive feedback for evidence-based clinical psychedelic therapy from Jonathan Davis MLA; Dr Marisa Paterson MLA; Michael Pettersson MLA as well as from Opposition Health spokesperson, Guilia Jones, and Peter Cain MLA.

Mind Medicine Australia's purpose is to promote awareness and regulated access in Australia to these therapies through the medical system in a safe and effective way for the treatment of certain intractable mental illnesses to enable a far greater number of people to get well. Mind Medicine's board includes ex Chief of the Defence Forces, Admiral Chris Barrie AC, retired federal minister, Andrew Robb AO, and one of Australia's leading ethicists, Dr Simon Longstaff AO.

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