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Ex-Chief of Defence Force urges ACT Government to allow medical use of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy

Ex-Chief of the Defence Force, Admiral Chris Barrie AC, has urged the ACT Government to allow the medical use of psilocybin and MDMA assisted psychotherapies for patients suffering from treatment-resistant depression and treatment resistant post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Admiral Barrie said that MDMA-assisted psychotherapy, in particular, offers hope to veterans and others who have been battling PTSD for years. He also noted the contradiction between the ACT moving to decriminalise the use of MDMA and psilocybin for recreational purposes but not allowing these substances to be used as part of psychotherapy in a medical setting.

Admiral Barrie said that, *"I have no comment on the pros and cons of the ACT's push for decriminalising the personal use of psilocybin and MDMA. However, if this happens, it would be ridiculous if a medical practitioner, properly trained in the application of psychedelic-assisted therapies, couldn't prescribe MDMA or psilocybin to treat a patient suffering from treatment-resistant PTSD or treatment-resistant depression in a much safer clinical environment."*

"Sufferers with treatment-resistant PTSD or treatment-resistant depression can be at severe risk because, by definition, they have exhausted conventional treatments. Allowing a medical practitioner in the ACT with Special Access Scheme approval from the TGA to provide psychedelic-assisted therapy gives the patient the opportunity of receiving a treatment that has been shown to be safe with high remission and response rates."

Currently the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) can, under its Special Access Scheme, provide an approval to a medical practitioner to treat a treatment-resistant patient with MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for PTSD and psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy for depression. However a "Catch 22" exists between Federal and ACT legislation. A medical practitioner with approval from the TGA who prescribed one of these therapies for a patient in the ACT would be criminally liable under current ACT legislation because of the confusion in the legislation between medical and recreational use.

Mind Medicine Australia, which supports the clinical use of psychedelic-assisted therapy in medically controlled settings, said the ACT Health Minister, Rachel Stephen-Smith, and the ACT Mental Health Minister, Emma Davidson, had both been briefed on this problem and are now considering changes to ACT legislation to allow psychedelic-assisted therapy to be utilised by a medical practitioner if they received an approval for this treatment from the TGA.



Mind Medicine Australia Chairman, Mr Peter Hunt AM, said that *“The Special Access Scheme is a compassionate and sensible scheme that recognises that current mainstream treatments aren’t providing a solution to certain patients with PTSD or depression and that those patients are suffering because of this treatment failure. There are now ACT medical practitioners trained in the application of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy who would like to have this effective and safe treatment available as an option for treatment-resistant patients. It seems cruel to deny this when the medical practitioner has already received a TGA approval to use this treatment for that patient”*.

Overseas trials have found that MDMA-assisted psychotherapy can be safely used to treat patients with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and psilocybin-assisted therapy can be safely used to treat patients with depression. In both cases remission and response rates have been significantly higher than existing treatments. The treatments involve only 2-3 sessions with the medicines as part of psychotherapy and only occur in medically controlled environments.

According to Canberra resident Mr Tony Shields, *“The substances in clinical settings are unadulterated, the dosing levels are controlled, patients can’t take the substances home and patients are screened to ensure that they have no contraindications.”*

Although not yet mainstream treatment, Canada, Switzerland, Israel and the United States enable these therapies to be available to medical practitioners and their patients on a case by case basis. 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. Given our increasing mental illness epidemic, this legislation must now be changed to avoid further suffering and suicides.

About Us: www.mindmedicineaustralia.org

Mind Medicine Australia is Australia’s leading not-for-profit organisation working on the use of medicinal psilocybin and MDMA-assisted therapies to treat a range of mental illnesses. Mind Medicine Australia exists to help alleviate the suffering caused by our accelerating mental illness epidemic in Australia, through expanding the treatment options available to medical practitioners and their patients who are not getting well through existing treatment modalities.

Mind Medicine Australia’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. MMA’s focus is wholly clinical.

For further information please contact, or to arrange an interview, please contact

- **Admiral Chris Barrie AC - 0418 237 433**
- **Tony Shields - ACT Chapter Leader of Mind Medicine Australia - 0418 676 801.**