



Media Alert: 22 November 2022

An Urgent Opportunity to Help Fix Australia's Broken Mental Health System by Supporting Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy

Australia's mental health system is broken. Rates of mental illness and addiction are skyrocketing, leading to immense suffering and suicide in this nation. Even pre-Covid, Australia's mental illness statistics were the second worst of all OECD nations, only ahead of Iceland! Now we have at least 1 in 7 people on antidepressants including 1 in 4 older adults and children as young as 4 years old being prescribed psychiatric medications with significant side effects and risks. 3 out of 4 Australians say their mental health has declined during the pandemic. Current treatments for depression only lead to remission in 30-35% of cases and existing treatments for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder lead to remission in only 5-10% of cases.

This broken system has led to thousands of Australians with treatment-resistant mental illness.

Franco Bortolin is a prime example of the reality for people with severe treatment-resistant mental illness.

He tragically lost his life to suicide after a 3-year battle with treatment-resistant depression, leaving behind his wife of 30 years, Vanessa, and their beloved daughter Zara.

After exhausting every option our Australian medical system had to offer, including 19 anti-depressant and anti-psychotic drugs and 96 ECT shock therapy treatments, Vanessa was filled with hope when she read about the incredible results of psychedelic-assisted therapy in overseas trials. Unfortunately, with the current regulations in Australia there is no legal access pathway, and he took his life before he was able to access this treatment.

On November 7, 2022, Vanessa delivered a letter to her local Member of Parliament and Prime Minister of Australia, Anthony Albanese.

In her letter, Vanessa has highlighted the cruelty of disallowing treatment-resistant patients like her husband to receive access to these potentially life-saving treatments, when nothing else has worked and the risk of suicide is great.

She has requested Mr Albanese meet with her to discuss the current scheduling of these substances and to find a way to allow treatment-resistant patients to access treatment.

This is in response to the recent Interim Decision from the TGA not to support the limited rescheduling of psilocybin and MDMA. This rescheduling, if successful, will allow patients with treatment-resistant depression, like Franco, the opportunity to access psychedelic-assisted therapy in a medical environment under the strict controls outlined in the rescheduling applications. It will also bring Australia in line with other leading nations such as the United States, Canada, Switzerland and Israel in allowing access to these treatments via compassionate and expanded access schemes.

The TGA's final decision will be announced in December. A public submission period is currently open until this Thursday, November 24, in which members of the public can respond to and OPPOSE the Interim Decision not to support rescheduling.



MIND MEDICINE A U S T R A L I A

Mind Medicine Australia Board Director and Head of The Ethics Centre Dr Simon Longstaff said that: *“It is unethical to withhold these medicines from Australians who are suffering with treatment-resistant conditions in medically controlled environments.”*

As Vanessa wrote in her letter: *“Prime Minister, you can help put a stop to the immense suffering in this nation. Please reschedule these substances for therapeutic use. Please don’t let another child lose a parent to suicide.”*

For those who wish to learn more about these therapies, Professor David Nutt – the Head of Neuropsychopharmacology at Imperial College, London and the head of Drug Science – is giving live lectures in Sydney on November 23 and in Melbourne on November 25, 29 and 30.

Find details of Professor Nutt’s lectures here - <https://mindmedicineaustralia.org.au/professor-david-nutt-australian-tour-2022/>

Read Vanessa’s letter here - <https://mindmedicineaustralia.org.au/wp-content/themes/cc-MMA/temp/A-Letter-to-Anthony-Albanese.pdf>

A short (4 min) video showing Vanessa reading and then delivering her letter can be viewed here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDSI2SOTQ2w>

The full (15 min) video showing Vanessa reading and then delivering her letter can be viewed here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVpgA1z1G54>

Learn more about the TGA’s Interim Decision not to support rescheduling here - <https://www.mindmedicineaustralia.org.au/tga>

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 and suicides caused by our accelerating mental illness epidemic in Australia, through expanding the treatment options available to medical practitioners and their patients. Visit: <https://www.mindmedicineaustralia.org>

Potential interviewees include:

- Professor David Nutt
- Vanessa Bortolin
- Peter Hunt AM, Chair, Mind Medicine Australia
- Tania de Jong AM, Executive Director, Mind Medicine Australia

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