



MEDIA RELEASE for immediate release - Monday 6th April 2020

Mind Medicine Australia calls for URGENT Mental Health Innovation Taskforce to tackle the mental health epidemic sparked by Covid-19

The Hon. Andrew Robb AO, former Trade Investment Minister and a Director of [Mind Medicine Australia](#) (MMA) and the [Board](#) of MMA strongly support recommendations for the Government to form a Mental Health Innovation Taskforce in the wake of COVID-19 and the recent bushfire tragedy. The Taskforce would guide the government in planning the next steps to manage the increasing mental health epidemic triggered by both events.

Mind Medicine Australia is a charity that enables the development of regulatory-approved and research-backed psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy for the treatment of mental ill-health in Australia.

Medicine-Assisted Psychotherapies offer highly innovative treatment options that are currently the subject of intense research and development. The aim of the research is to determine both the safety and efficacy of a class of substances that have, in many cases, been used by humans as medicines for millennia, but have unfortunately been prohibited as part of the “War on Drugs” in recent decades. As of today, the research indicates that psychedelics, when administered as part of therapy in a medically controlled environment, may be some of the most promising treatments for common mental illnesses such as Depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Notably, research indicates that clinical success can be achieved when treating people whose conditions are resistant to other forms of treatment, after just a few sessions.

MMA argues that the proposed Taskforce should include a senior clinician familiar with global developments in this field of medical research and clinical practice and have access to overseas experts in this developing field. MMA stands ready to help the federal government identify the most appropriate candidate to assist with the Taskforce and access overseas experts.

Medicine-Assisted Psychotherapies have already been granted “breakthrough therapy designation” in the United States by the Food and Drug Administration to fast track the approval process. They are also already available to doctors and their patients, on a limited basis, through expanded access schemes in the United States, Switzerland, and Israel.

Already, one in five Australian adults have a chronic mental health condition, and one in eight Australians (and one in four older adults) take antidepressants, and suicide rates are high. Experts warn that the adverse mental health effects might surpass the physical health impacts of the coronavirus. Frontline charities are suggesting that the effects of the current pandemic on mental illness could be “seven times” worse than the spike in mental illness caused by the recent bushfires.

The Hon. Andrew Robb AO argues that the development of a government strategy to tackle the burgeoning mental health crisis must include the evaluation and possible introduction of innovative treatment options like Medicine-Assisted Psychotherapies. **“Remission rates for people experiencing Depression, using the standard treatments of antidepressants and psychotherapy, are only about 35 per cent effective and the remission rates for PTSD even lower than this . But Medicine-Assisted Psychotherapies have been shown to have remission rates of 60-80% in recent overseas trials; after just two to three treatments.”**

According to the chairman of MMA, **Peter Hunt AM**, **“A proactive approach to broadening the treatment options available for people who have a mental illness is desperately needed. With the likelihood of the coronavirus pandemic continuing for months to come, many more Australians will experience anxiety, trauma and depression and suicide rates could significantly increase in the absence of affirmative action.”**

MMA Board member, **Dr Simon Longstaff AO** says, ***“We should not allow the prejudices of the past to deny relief in the present. If these medicines are safe and effective when applied in a clinical environment, as current research suggests, then Australian governments have an obligation to make them available.”***

Tania de Jong AM, Executive Director of MMA, says, **“The remission rates that could be achieved with Medicine-Assisted Psychotherapies could also release vast financial resources to help governments around Australia develop and fund more proactive agendas to assist the welfare of Australians and the nation’s recovery. The financial burden from mental illness, which represents an enormous amount of human suffering, can be expected to increase significantly in the future if governments don’t take decisive action to introduce new treatment options. Unlike conventional treatments which often require patients to endure years of daily medications and weekly support from a mental health professional, Medicine-Assisted Psychotherapy can be effective after just two to three clinically supervised sessions, and the medicines are safe and non-addictive when properly used in a medically-controlled environment.”**

For further information on Medicine-Assisted-Psychotherapies, please visit the MMA [website](#).
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Media Please note:

The following are available for interview:

- The Hon. Andrew Robb AO
- Peter Hunt AM
- Dr Simon Longstaff AO
- Tania de Jong AM

For further information, or to arrange an interview, please contact Margot Gorski on 0412 393 394 or at margot@prmatters.com.au.