
Suicide warning over denied drugs

By **MAX MADDISON**, JOURNALIST

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Delaying mental practitioners access to psilocybin and MDMA could result in a spike in suicides amid an ongoing national mental health crisis, according to advocates for psychedelic-assisted therapy.

After an interim decision by the Therapeutic Goods Administration knocked back an application to reschedule psychedelic drugs as controlled substances — rather than prohibited — proponents for the novel medicine say the current mental health infrastructure requires new avenues of treatment.

The new submission to the TGA — prepared by Mind Medicine Australia, the charity behind the initial application — noted that without change, thousands of people suffering suicidal thoughts may take their own lives.

That position was supported by dozens of letters the group received after the health regulator's preliminary decision, with mental illness sufferers, as well as their family and friends, lamenting the failure of conventional psychiatric drugs to result in any substantive change.

After trying multiple forms of treatment, including counselling and electroconvulsive therapy, Rachel Northam's partner took his own life in January last year.

"The situation in Australia with suicide is desperate, the current treatments on offer do not get into the space in between in a person's mind where the significant suffering exists," Ms Northam said in a letter to the MMA.

"I watched as a grown, highly intelligent, loving, caring father of four withdrew and lost the will to fight on in a system that offered him nothing new or different. There has to be a better way."

Her experience is shared by many, particularly those who believe current approaches to post traumatic stress disorder and treatment-resistant mental illness were inadequate, and new approaches were desperately needed.

Annie Mason said she had tried “every drug on the market” in a bid to help her daughter who suffered medication-resistant depression and PTSD, and she was angered by the TGA’s “closed-minded attitudes”.

“In the past 15 years we have nearly lost her to suicide on a number of occasions.

“We have spent tens of thousands of dollars seeking treatment within Australia with little gain,” Ms Mason said.

“You know the alarming suicide rates in this country and here you have a therapy that could change that ... and you are denying us access.

“It is clear that you have not lost a child to suicide or do not really understand what it means to suffer endlessly.”

In its resubmission, MMA said the failure of the TGA to reconsider its position would “put us even further behind other nations and lead to significant avoidable suffering and suicides”.

“Rescheduling is a pathway to hope for those suffering with treatment-resistant mental illnesses,” MMA founders Peter Hunt and Tania de Jong told The Australian.

“It will be a statement that the TGA recognises that innovation is desperately needed to save lives.

“Australians are suffering and dying, and this treatment finally offers an opportunity for true healing.”

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