


TGA to rule on psychedelic drug access for mental health problems

By **MAX MADDISON**, JOURNALIST

8:32PM JANUARY 28, 2021 •  13 COMMENTS

A group of prominent Australians is continuing to push for greater access to psychedelic drugs to treat mental health problems, saying the benefits and cost of inaction are impossible to ignore.

As the health regulator prepares to release an interim decision on the issues next week, psychiatrists and public figures, including Admiral Chris Barrie and former trade minister Andrew Robb, have backed Mind Medicine Australia's pleas to ease restrictions around medical use of psychedelics. The February 3 decision by the Therapeutic Goods Administration will determine whether psilocybin (the active ingredient in magic mushrooms) and MDMA (ecstasy) will be rescheduled from prohibited substances to controlled drugs, making it easier for psychiatrists and researchers to access them.

A former chief of the Australian Defence Force, Admiral Barrie has seen the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder first-hand. After establishing PTSD charity Fearless, he was approached to become a board member of MMA. He said his research had highlighted that psychedelics might prove a "pathway to a cure ... We're joined at the hip in trying to find ways to cure PTSD. The only way we can do that, according to the experts I talk to, is through the use of psychedelic drugs," Admiral Barrie said.

He said the mental health crisis went well beyond veterans. "We started with saying about a million sufferers but that was pre-pandemic, pre-summer bushfires," he said. "How many are there now? No idea, except there are a lot more than there used to be."

Edith Cowan lecturer Stephen Bright said the decision was "highly unlikely" at this point because Australia needed a more robust regulatory infrastructure to deal with the nascent medicine.

"One key concern ... is this needs to be integrated within that healthcare system," he said. "If it were made available for psychiatrists to prescribe outside the public healthcare system, it might

cost \$20,000 for a course of treatment. The people that most need it probably won't be able to - access it.”

After procuring supply terms for MDMA and psilocybin at a “fraction” of current costs, MMA founders Tania de Jong and Peter Hunt want to dispel myths attached to psychedelic drugs by launching a training centre for psychotherapists and establishing a “centre of excellence” to position Australia as a global leader in novel psychedelic research.

MAX MADDISON, JOURNALIST

Max Maddison is a reporter at The Australian. He graduated from a Bachelor of Politics, Economics and Social Sciences (Hons I) at the University of Sydney. He began working for the paper in 2015 as an Editorial... [Read more](#)

