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## Psychedelic drug therapy now offered at Calgary clinic, the first of its kind in Alberta

ATMA Urban Journey Clinic uses magic mushrooms to treat depression, anxiety, PTSD

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Psilocybin is the ingredient in magic mushrooms that causes hallucinations, but in medically supervised settings

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In January, an Airdrie man with terminal cancer received the first federally approved magic mushroom treatment in Alberta. This week, the first clinic in the province to use psychedelic therapy has opened in Calgary.

The ATMA Urban Journey Clinic is in northwest Calgary and will be a training centre for mental health professionals from across Canada.

CEO David Harder says the clinic is the result of decades of research and trial studies.

"It's kind of the opposite of what a typical antidepressant or psychotic medication would do," he told [The Homestretch](#).

"Typically, they will suppress or numb down what's happening in your emotions and spirit body, whereas the psychedelics will actually raise those things and allow a therapist to work with you to really work through and not just suppress whatever that is that's holding you back, for example, for depression or anxiety, PTSD especially."

For Tony White, the magic mushroom therapy allowed him to let go of some of the anxiety and depression that had been crowding in since his terminal cancer diagnosis. He received the therapy on Jan. 1.

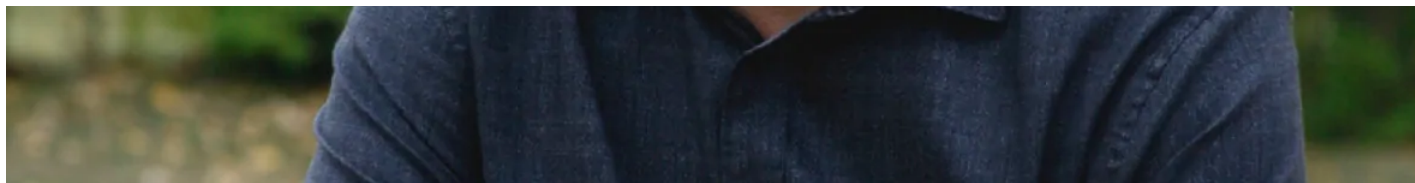
"I just was lying there and I felt like I couldn't be at more peace then, right then and there," said White in mid-January.



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David Harder is CEO of the ATMA Urban Journey Clinic, the first of its kind to open in Alberta. It's located in northwest Calgary and will provide therapy for terminally ill patients. (Studio White)

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Psilocybin, the active drug in magic mushrooms, has shown promise in relieving end-of-life distress for palliative cancer patients, but it's still undergoing clinical trials.

Since August 2020, Health Canada has granted 20 exemptions to patients diagnosed with cancer to treat their end-of-life distress.

Currently, Health Canada grants exemptions that allow for individual therapy sessions using psilocybin for the terminally ill. The new clinic will start with this mandate, but Harder hopes to see it expand.

"We're also applying on behalf of a number of people with mental health conditions, depression, anxiety and PTSD. So we're going to see if they approve those who are waiting to hear.... They seem very open to the idea, but obviously they're being very cautious and moving slowly for safety's sake."

The clinic will administer only magic mushroom therapy for now, partly for safety reasons.

Harder explained it's difficult to find other psychedelic drugs in a pure state as they are often laced with fentanyl and cutting agents.

"That's why we're only sourcing mushrooms at this point," he said. "It's a mushroom. So you can see it. It's a dried mushroom. So that's where Health Canada is saying it's a much less risk than, say, some of the white powder drugs that are being used for psychedelics."

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Group therapy and psychedelic-assisted sessions will be offered under medical supervision at ATMA Journey Centers, which opened this week in Calgary. (ATMA Journey Centers Inc.)

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Palliative care therapy is being offered at no cost.

"We believe it's something we can give back," Harder said. "We're moving forward with mental health treatments that will be charged for the treatment of therapy, the therapist's time and on the sitting time. But with the palliative care, we believe this is something where we can give back."

Harder said there is a screening process as part of the exemption application. He said each case may vary but generally the participant undergoes counselling sessions before and afterward. And, he said, there are a couple of people on hand during the four- to five-hour psychedelic experience, including a therapist, psychologist or psychiatrist.

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Dr. Ravinder (Ravi) Bains has been appointed the chief medical officer for ATMA Journey Centers Inc. (ATMA Journey Centers Inc)

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Harder said this form of therapy, once more widely accepted, holds promise for a wider range of treatments.

"The studies have been done," he said. "We know this is safe. We know this is efficacious. We know it helps. And with the growing mental health crisis in our country, we know that this is something that could really help the issues that our society is facing."

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