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VICE World News

Magic Mushroom Stores Are Open in Canada — But They're Still Illegal

Canada and some U.S. jurisdictions are loosening their laws around psilocybin as black market dispensaries crop up.



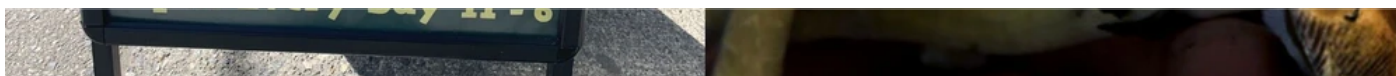
By [Manisha Krishnan](#)

TORONTO, CA

12.8.21



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THE COCA LEAF CAFE & MUSHROOM DISPENSARY IS OPEN IN VANCOUVER. PHOTOS BY AUTHOR AND BY JOE AMON/MEDIANEWS GROUP/THE DENVER POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

On a sparse stretch of Vancouver's East Hastings Street, the Coca Leaf Cafe & Mushroom Dispensary stands out.

The menus displayed on a sandwich board and in the shop's front window boldly proclaim the store's legally dubious offerings: microdoses and high doses of psilocybin, shroom kits, peyote, kratom (a herb native to Southeast Asia), and a variety of Bolivian coca leaf products—coca leaf is used to make cocaine. Inside, amid psychedelic paintings and drug war propaganda posters, the various drugs, some in plant form, others dried, sit in glass cases, while a barista stands behind a bar taking orders for coca leaf teas and CBD sandwiches.

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Larsen's is one of a handful of mushroom dispensaries that have opened up in Vancouver—despite the fact that it's illegal to sell psychedelic mushrooms in Canada. He's expecting the number of storefronts to grow exponentially in the coming months, not unlike the wave of unregulated weed dispensaries that proliferated in the years preceding legalization.

“Within a few years there's going to be hundreds of mushroom and psychedelic dispensaries across Canada,” Larsen said.

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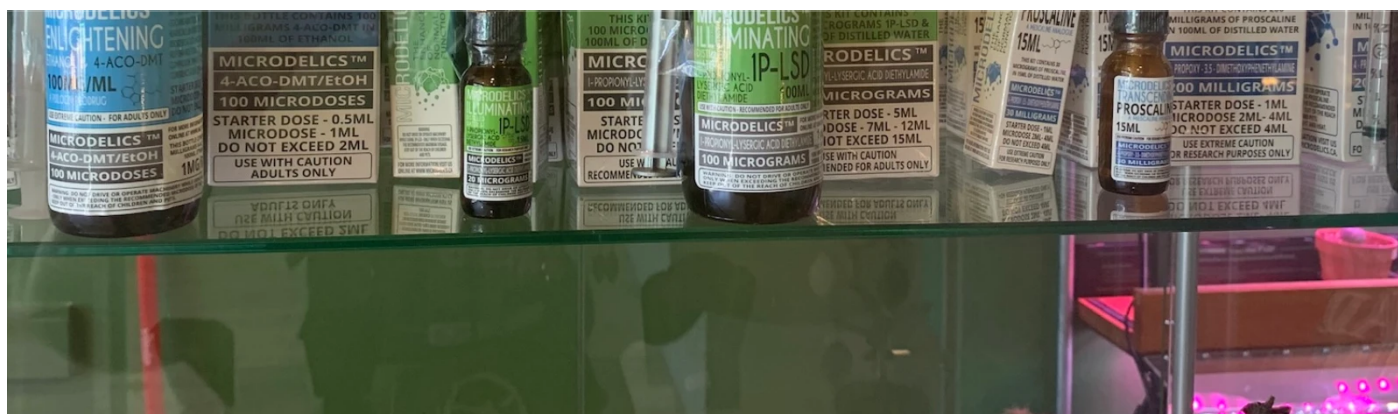
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SOME ITEMS FOR SALE AT THE COCA LEAF CAFE & MUSHROOM DISPENSARY. PHOTO BY AUTHOR

The shroom boom is taking place online too, with Instagram-based dispensaries marketing microdoses at people seeking mental clarity or anxiety relief. All of this comes at a time when research into psychedelics is becoming more mainstream, jurisdictions such as Oregon and the District of Columbia are legalizing and decriminalizing shrooms, and Big Weed investors are sinking capital into medical psilocybin companies.

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THE SHOP SELLS LSD ANALOGUES. PHOTO BY AUTHOR

Other products in the shop skirt around legal loopholes. For example, kratom is “not a controlled drug but you’re not supposed to sell it for human consumption,” Larsen said, “which is too bad because it’s really beneficial for people dealing with opiate withdrawal or pain relief.” He also sells LSD analogues—technically legal because their molecular makeup is slightly different to the drugs on Canada’s list of

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because he's selling people coca tea and a gram or two of psychedelic mushrooms,' it's just not going to happen.”

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While the legal status of mushrooms in Canada hasn't yet changed, the government

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going to talk about where you're going to get it. Just get it from some mystery spot.”

Lewin said if a dispensary like Larsen’s did get busted, it could result in a constitutional challenge against the prohibition of shrooms—one he feels confident lawyers could win.

“We have enough research. If we fought this in court, we would win,” he said. “We could clearly establish that it's safe and that it is effective.”

Drugs

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“I just really enjoyed the alternative effects that it had, especially emotionally feeling like if I took a higher dose, I felt this mental clarity and reset the day after. It was also great for creativity,” said Stacey, who does not want her real name used because selling mushrooms is illegal.

She said she buys her shrooms from a trusted source and adds ingredients like ginger and lion’s mane to enhance the effects (lion’s mane is a type of mushroom that some claim can improve cognitive function). Each capsule is 100 to 200 milligrams.

Stacey keeps her prices pretty low—she charges around \$2.50 for a 200-milligram capsule—to make plant medicine accessible. She said she already sees a “grossly capitalistic” approach being taken in the push to legalize mushrooms, not unlike

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