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# Warning UK faces 'worst research blackout in history' as Home Office falters on drug law

TORY MP Crispin Blunt has blamed the Home Office for blocking a change to how an illegal hallucinogenic drug is tested as a new antidepressant.

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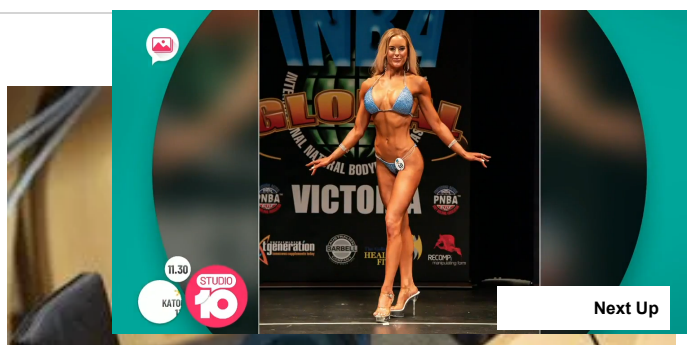
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In an op-ed seen by Express.co.uk, Crispin Blunt MP describes how he urged Prime Minister Boris Johnson to change what is known as the "schedule" of the drug psilocybin. This change would mean it would be easier to run trials on its use in mental health treatments. The Prime Minister had already approved the rescheduling of psilocybin for exploring its potential as a treatment for depression, which he informed Mr Blunt in a meeting in May.

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Despite this, the Home Office “fails to act, perpetuating what can be considered the worst research blackout in scientific history,” according to the Conservative Drug Policy Reform Group (CDPRG), of which Mr Blunt is chairman.

Rescheduling, in this case, means that psilocybin would be easier to get hold of and test in scientific and medical trials.

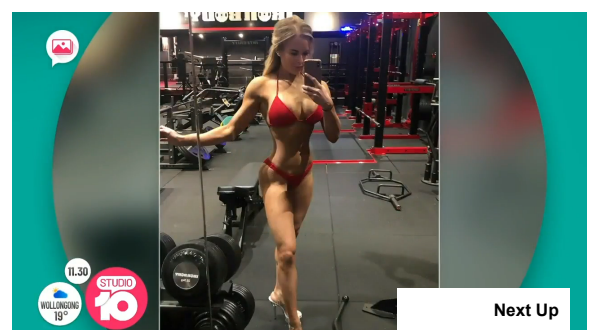
Psilocybin, found in magic mushrooms, will still be a Class A drug for anyone looking to consume it.

The group say that if the Home Office continues to drag their feet over making psilocybin easier to trial for medical purposes, there will be “dire consequences for the UK’s life sciences sector” and those who “stand to benefit” from new treatments.

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Crispin Blunt MP is Chairman of the Conservative Drug Policy Reform Group (Image: PA)





Prime Minister Boris Johnson approved the change in May (Image: PA)

Mr Blunt used an analogy to describe the current situation of not looking at the uses of certain illegal drugs in treating mental health problems.

He likened restrictions on cannabis and other currently illegal substances to “keeping an offender whose risk of future offending is close to zero, is desperate and able to become a contributing positive member of society”.

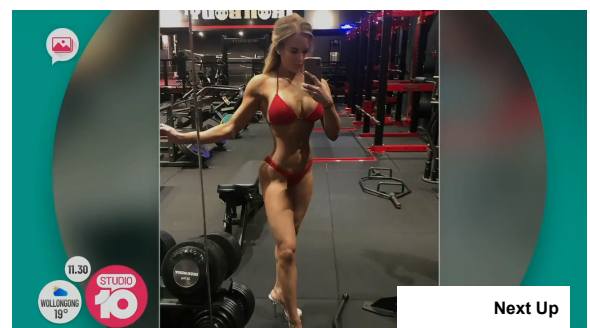
He said: “Some sensible supportive probation supervision might be appropriate, but instead they are locked up in a maximum-security prison at vast expense indefinitely.”

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Psilocybin is found in magic mushrooms (Image: Getty)

He added: "This delay matters.

"In the 110 days that have passed since the PM's sign off nearly 2,000 people have taken their own lives; the majority probably preventable when this research is translated into treatment."

A Home Office spokesperson said: "There is an established process for the development of medicines, which enables medicines including psilocybin to be developed, evaluated in clinical trials and licensed based on an assessment of their quality, safety and efficacy.

"The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) is currently considering barriers to legitimate research with controlled drugs. The first part of their review was published in July and the second part of the work is now underway. We will carefully consider any recommendations or advice they provide.

"We currently have no plans to reschedule psilocybin under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001."

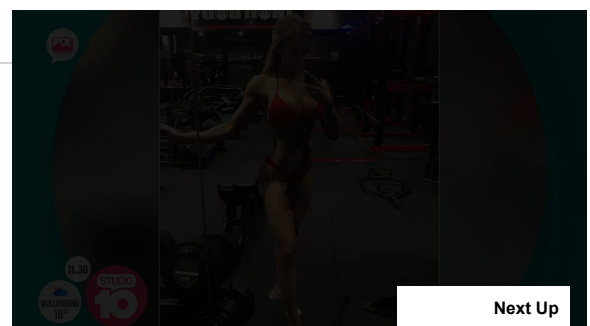
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Cannabis is also the subject of trials for treating illness (Image: Getty)

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Psilocybin has been the subject of numerous clinical trials in addressing mental health conditions against which currently-available medication has had little effect.

Dr Robin Carhart-Harris and Professor David Nutt of Imperial College London have found that psilocybin could target areas of the brain which current antidepressants cannot touch.

However, the CDPRG argues that the brain drain coming from professionals and experts in the space leaving for other countries with different drug policies will put the UK further behind on pioneering new treatments.

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The CDPRG add that a change in policy on psilocybin could pave the way for exploring how other drugs, like LSD or MDMA, can be used to treat mental health conditions.

Currently, psilocybin cannot be produced, supplied or prescribed without Home Office sign-off.

Yet recent data from YouGov shows that over half of the UK public support a change in the law which would mean psilocybin is more easily accessible for treatment trials.

A Home Office spokesperson said: “There is an established process for the development of medicines, which enables medicines including psilocybin to be developed, evaluated in clinical trials and licensed based on an assessment of their quality, safety and efficacy.

“The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) is currently considering barriers to legitimate research with controlled drugs. The first part of their review was published in July and the second part of the work is now underway. We will carefully consider any recommendations or advice they provide.

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