

Sydney Researchers Awarded Over \$2.2 Million By Australian Government To Study MDMA, Psilocybin



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I cover the psychedelic news beat

Down Under: The Australian government is funding research into psychedelic substances for their ... [+] GETTY

The Australian government is evolving its stance on the potential usefulness of psychedelic drugs for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and alcohol misuse and eating disorders.

The Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF), under the Australian Government's Innovative Therapies for Mental Illness Grant, has awarded two Sydney research teams a total of over A\$3 million (\$2.24 million) to study MDMA and psilocybin therapies for mental illness. The MRFF is a multibillion-dollar, long-term investment supporting Australian health and medical research. The government fund is intended to “transform health and medical research and innovation to improve lives, build the economy and contribute to health system sustainability.”

The dual awards will help to examine the efficacy of MDMA-assisted therapy to treat combined PTSD and alcohol use disorder, as well as funding a clinical trial of psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy in anorexia nervosa.

The two grants come on the heels of a recent decision by the [Therapeutic Goods Administration \(TGA\)](#) in December rejecting an application to amend existing poisons regulations to allow for psilocybin and MDMA to be used in medically controlled environments. The ruling means that psilocybin and MDMA will continue to be confined in the category of Schedule 9 drugs, which are prohibited substances, rather than moving them to Schedule 8 drugs, which are controlled substances eligible for therapeutic use.

In North America and Europe, clinical studies of MDMA-assisted therapy to treat PTSD are [showing positive results in Phase 3 trials](#). The Multidisciplinary Association for

Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), which conducts clinical trials in the U.S. under the guidance and regulations of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), has shown that after receiving a combination of psychotherapy and MDMA, 67 percent of participants who received the drug no longer met the criteria for PTSD (compared to 32 percent who received placebo). Studies using psilocybin are also showing great promise relieving the symptoms of depression, PTSD, eating disorders and drug misuse disorders.

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Increased brain activity diagram. GETTY

“There is a high rate of comorbidity between alcohol use disorders and PTSD, which is associated with greater clinical impairment, poorer prognosis and greater treatment attrition,” said Associate Professor Kirsten Morley from the University of Sydney. “We urgently require innovative integrated treatments that can enhance outcomes for patients with these treatment resistant complexities. One promising agent that can enhance psychotherapy is *3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine* (MDMA).”

The trial of psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy seeks to treat anorexia nervosa, says the release, and will “build on strong international collaborations to assess the safety and efficacy of psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy for patients for whom conventional anorexia nervosa treatment hasn’t worked.”

Professor Stephen Touyz from the Faculty of Science at the University of Sydney emphasized the reality that anorexia nervosa continues to have one of the highest mortality rates in psychiatry. “It is an extremely debilitating and pervasive disorder that can result in immense suffering for those afflicted by it and a nightmare for those caring for a loved one or friend,” he said.

The cooperation of the Australian government, combined with international collaboration alongside noted psychedelic researchers from Imperial College and Johns Hopkins University, has had the effect of buoying the future outlook of innovative therapies using MDMA and psilocybin.

“What is particularly exciting with psychedelics is the political will for Australia to take an international lead in this area as exemplified by this MRFF funding round,” said Sydney researcher Professor Iain McGregor, a team member on the psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy trial. “We are overjoyed to be working with a dream team of world-leading researchers from Imperial College, Johns Hopkins University and leading Australian universities on this incredibly significant trial.”

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