

VIU Establishes New Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy Program



From left to right: Adjunct Professor Dr. Pamela Kryskow, VIU Elder-in-Residence Geraldine Manson and VIU Nursing Professor Dr. Shannon Dames. Photo: Vancouver Island University

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The graduate certificate program is the first of its kind from an accredited university in Canada.

As growing research continues to demonstrate that psychedelic-assisted therapies show promise for treating mental health conditions, a new program is set to launch in September 2022 at Vancouver Island University (VIU).

The [Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy program](#) is a graduate-level certificate program offered through the Faculty of Health and Human Services. Designed to train health-care professionals to deliver psychedelic-assisted therapies, it is the first program of its kind to include both theory and supervised practice from an accredited university in Canada.

Each week, the program participants will come together in multidisciplinary large and small group format to integrate the knowledge. The program is developed by VIU Nursing Professor Dr. Shannon Dames and Adjunct Professor Dr. Pamela Kryskow, who is the medical lead of two psychedelic-assisted therapy programs – [Roots to Thrive](#) and [My Community Thrives](#). For several years, Dames and Kryskow have been developing and training others to deliver resilience programming that uses ketamine as the psychedelic agent with a multi-disciplinary team of health professionals.

“Psychedelic-assisted therapy will be an integral part of mental wellness therapeutic models in the very near future,” says Kryskow. “The demand for skilled and experienced therapists, nurses, doctors and spiritual care specialists is already growing and through this program we are able to ensure that trained and well-vetted professionals are available to meet that demand.”

The program coordinators are also collaborating with the [Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies](#) (MAPS) to develop a dual certificate program that would allow those who complete the VIU program to also satisfy the requirements of the MAPS MDMA Therapy Training Program.

The certificate program incorporates learnings from [Roots to Thrive](#), founded by Dames and co-created by numerous academics, Indigenous knowledge keepers and health professionals. The evidence-informed group therapy program aims to enhance mindfulness and self-compassion to reduce stress and has resulted in significant positive impacts on the mental well-being of participants. For the past two years, psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy has been integrated into the program as a tool to address treatment-resistant conditions such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, addiction and disordered eating with success rates in the 80 per cent and above range.

“In a psychotherapy realm, we primarily talk to people at the level of the mind, which may or may not impact people at the level of the body, where trauma resides,” explains Dames. “In psychedelic-assisted therapy, the nervous system moves into the background, enabling people to drop into their bodies. And it’s in this place that the potential to tend to unhealed wounds and re-orient oneself to the world becomes possible.”

The curriculum is delivered in collaboration with VIU Elder-in-Residence Geraldine Manson, Indigenous professionals and cultural safety experts, which “supports the program’s overarching vision to actively engage in decolonization and reconciliation for all,” says Dames.

“Co-creating a healing community, referred to as Roots to Thrive, where everyone is welcome and where patients and providers see eye to eye, has transformed how I practice medicine,” says Kryskow. “This format recognizes that health care and therapeutic professionals are in need of the same wellness programs as our patients and clients.”

The 15-credit, part-time program runs from September through August and is designed for working professionals. The program includes theory courses, which are provided virtually for three hours each week, enabling participants from across Canada to participate.

Program applicants can register for the program between now and March 31, 2022, and should have a bachelor’s degree or equivalent in training and/or education. For more information, visit the [Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy program](#) page.

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