

Mixed messages: The growing use of illicit substances as therapeutic agents in Australia

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Introduction: Earlier this year, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) announced that Australia will become the first nation to federally recognise 3,4-methylenedioxy-methamphetamine (MDMA) and psilocybin (the psychoactive component of 'magic mushrooms') as prescription medicines (1). MDMA has been approved for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and psilocybin for treatment-resistant depression. As Australia increasingly moves towards recognising illicit substances as therapeutic agents, we may be able to draw on our recent experience with medicinal cannabis, which was similarly approved for medicinal use over 7 years ago (2).

Abstract body text: We will summarise the proposed methods of accessing these medicines, the available evidence around their efficacy and safety, as well as legal ramifications (e.g., positive roadside drug testing). We will also outline four key lessons from the cannabis experience which must be considered when permitting the use of psychedelic medicines: adequate research funding, clinical understanding of evidence, distinguishing between licit and illicit sources, and avoiding panacea hysteria.

Discussions and Conclusions: While it is unclear whether the prescription model for psilocybin and MDMA will follow a similar path to medicinal cannabis, there are several parallels that can be made. These reflections will provide us with the opportunity to maximise the safety and efficacy of these drugs and develop appropriate access pathways and clinical guidance.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: No conflicts of interest to declare.

1. Therapeutic Goods Administration. Change to classification of psilocybin and MDMA to enable prescribing by authorised psychiatrists 2023 [Available from: <https://www.tga.gov.au/news/media-releases/change-classification-psilocybin-and-mdma-enable-prescribing-authorised-psychiatrists>].
2. Therapeutic Goods Administration. Final decision on scheduling of cannabis and tetrahydrocannabinols: Frequently asked questions 2016 [Available from: <https://www.tga.gov.au/news/news/final-decision-scheduling-cannabis-and-tetrahydrocannabinols-frequently-asked-questions>].