

2-Day Program • February 6–7, 2025

Northern Australia Psychedelic Science (NAPS) Conference

QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute
300 Herston Road, Herston QLD 4006
Turrbal and Yuggera Country.



Sponsored by:



Scientific Organising Committee:

Associate Professor Vanessa Beesley

Professor Murat Yücel

Tom Kennedy

Juliana Da Silva Chaves

Hanna Beebe

Natalie Roset

Lotta Oikari

Ishara Rankothge



Northern Australia Psychedelic Science (NAPS) Conference

Venue

QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, 300 Herston Road, Herston QLD 4006
Turrbal and Yuggera Country.

Welcome

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the Inaugural Northern Australia Psychedelic Science (NAPS) Conference. This event is an exciting opportunity to bring together psychedelic researchers and clinicians from Northern Australia and beyond, fostering a vibrant community of practice.

The conference features an impressive program with approximately 40 speakers, including keynote lectures, panel discussions, concurrent sessions, workshops, interactive art, and a decadent social event. Over the next two days, you will:

- Engage with leading researchers sharing insights into their ground-breaking work.
- Participate in interactive workshops and art experiences designed to spark curiosity and deepen understanding of psychedelic therapy, cultural contexts, and ecological responsiveness.
- Explore the profound role of music as the “fourth therapist” in psychedelic therapy.
- Join thought-provoking panel discussions delving into the broader psychedelic ecosystem, patient selection, and tailoring therapies to individual needs.

We warmly encourage all delegates to attend the rooftop dinner at Soko, where you can relax, connect, and build relationships in a social atmosphere after the day’s sessions.

This conference is made possible through the generous support of Cortexa, our sponsor, and QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute. A special thanks goes to the Scientific Organising Committee and session chairs for their dedication in curating an exceptional program.

We wish you an enjoyable, enriching, and inspiring two days ahead.

Yours sincerely,



Associate Professor Vanessa Beesley
Behavioural Scientist & Team Head
Psychedelic Medicine and Supportive Care Lab
QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute



Professor Murat Yücel
Program Director Mental Health & Neuroscience
Group Leader Cognitive Fitness Lab
QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute

Day 1: Thursday, February 6, 2025

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM | Registration

Lecture Theatre

9:00 AM – 9:30 AM	Opening Ceremony
9:00 AM – 9:05 AM	Chairs: A/Prof. Vanessa Beesley & Prof. Murat Yücel
9:05 AM – 9:20 AM	Welcome to Country by Song-woman, Maroochy Elder Song-woman and Law-woman of the Turrbal People
9:20 AM – 9:30 AM	Housekeeping & Keynote Intro: A/Prof. Vanessa Beesley & Prof. Murat Yücel
9:30 AM – 10:30 AM	Keynote Dr. Paul Liknaitzky <i>Australia's World-First Psilocybin Studies: Treating Anxiety, Training Therapists, Transforming Polarisation</i> p10
10:30 AM – 11:00 AM	Morning Tea
Concurrent Session 1:	
11:00 AM – 12:30 PM	Evidence, Innovations and Approaches in Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy
11:00 AM – 11:05 AM	Chair: Prof. James Bennett-Levy
11:05 AM – 11:21 AM	Dr. Lena Oestreich <i>Systematic Review of Psilocybin and MDMA for Mental Health Treatment</i> p12
11:21 AM – 11:37 AM	Prof. James Bennett-Levy <i>Taking HEART: What Should We Do About Climate-Related PTSD?</i> p14
11:37 AM – 11:53 PM	Peta Blaisdell & Dr. Emily Tunks <i>Becoming Somebody Before Becoming Nobody: Somatic and Relational Approaches to MDMA Therapy</i> p16
11:53 PM – 12:09 PM	Ariana Elias <i>MDMA-Assisted Therapy for PTSD and Severe Eating Disorders</i> p18
12:09 PM – 12:25 PM	Dr. Nikola Ognyenovits <i>The Experience of a Community-Based Ketamine-Assisted Psychotherapy Practice in Brisbane</i> p20
12:25 PM – 12:30 PM	Chair Roundup
12:30 PM – 1:15 PM	Lunch

Concurrent Session 2:

1:15 PM – 2:30 PM	Transformative Therapies and Professional Insights
1:15 PM – 1:20 PM	Chairs: A/Prof. Vanessa Beesley and winner of the early career researcher abstract submissions, Rachel Ham
1:20 PM – 1:45 PM	Tom Kennedy & A/Prof. Vanessa Beesley <i>Findings from a World-First Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy Trial for Prolonged Grief Disorder p22</i>
1:45 PM – 1:55 PM	Natalie Roset & Hanna Beebe <i>Leveraging Nursing Skills in Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy: Building Safe and Trusting Spaces p26</i>
1:55 PM – 2:05 PM	Rachel Ham <i>Co-therapy in psychedelic-assisted therapy: translational insights from participant experiences p28</i>
2:05 PM – 2:15 PM	Dr. Tram Nguyen <i>The Benefits of Psychedelic Therapists and Researchers having Psychedelic Experiences p30</i>
2:15 PM – 2:25 PM	Dr. Jonathan Hart <i>How the Internal Family Systems Model Might Work for Altered States of Consciousness p32</i>
2:25 PM – 2:30 PM	Chair Roundup
2:30 PM – 3:00 PM	Afternoon Tea

Concurrent Session 3:

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM	The Psychedelic Revival and Ecosystem
3:00 PM – 3:05 PM	Chair: Dr. Prash Puspanathan
3:05 PM – 3:20 PM	Dr. Tony Barnett <i>Psychedelics in Addiction Research and Treatment: Social and Ethical Implications p34</i>
3:20 PM – 4:00 PM	Panel Discussion with Dr. Prash Puspanathan, Dr. Paul Liknaitzky & Dr. Tony Barnett <i>The Psychedelic Ecosystem: Regulation, Funding and Psychedelic Capitalism p36</i>
4:00 PM – 4:15 PM	Day 1 Close & Night Open: A/Prof. Vanessa Beesley & Prof. Murat Yücel

Workshop Room

10:30 AM – 11:00 AM	Morning Tea
11:00 AM – 12:30 PM	Workshop: Dr. Bianca Sebben, Kirt Mallie & Jem Stone <i>An Introduction to the Indigenous Psychedelic Assisted Therapy (IPAT) Model for Community Oriented Healing p38</i>
12:30 PM – 1:15 PM	Lunch
1:15 PM – 2:30 PM	Workshop: Dr. Esme Dark & Campbell Townsend <i>Deepening PAT Through Somatic Techniques and Metaphor p42</i>
2:30 PM – 3:00 PM	Afternoon Tea
3:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Workshop: Jem Stone & Kirt Mallie <i>Wayapa Wuurk - An Earth Connection Practice Based On Ancient Indigenous Wisdom p46</i>

Art Spaces

Soaring Together A Collaborative Art Experience

Artist-in-Residence Shevaun Russell

Day 1: *Delegates can each paint a watercolour feather to contribute to a set of wings.*

Grounding Walk

Artist-in-Residence Shevaun Russell

Sensory nature pieces -moss, sand, water, rocks, shells, feathers will be artfully displayed for participants to take a grounding walk. Guided by prompt cards participants will be invited to touch and feel the natural items.

AI Art Exhibition

A/Prof Vanessa Beesley

Dosed – Psilocybin Visions from The PARTING (Psilocybin-Assisted supportive psychoTherapy IN prolonged Grief) Trial

NAPS2025 Spotify Playlist

(Open Spotify and Scan This Code with the Camera)



6:30 PM – 10:00 PM	Conference Dinner Soko Peruvian-Japanese Rooftop Restaurant Level 14/7 Symes St, Fortitude Valley QLD 4006
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Day 2: Friday, February 7, 2025

9:00 AM – 9:30 AM | Registration (Institute sign-in required both days)

Lecture Theatre

9:30 AM – 10:30 AM	Workshop: Kirt Mallie <i>Sound Journey Experiential p50</i>
10:30 AM – 11:00 AM	Morning Tea
11:00 AM – 11:05 AM	Chair: A/Prof. Vanessa Beesley
11:05 AM – 12:00 PM	Keynote Dr. Margaret Ross <i>Bridging Realities - Participant Experiences in Psilocybin-Assisted Psychotherapy at End of Life, and What the FDA Won't Hear About p52</i>
12:00 PM – 12:20 PM	Agnieszka Sekula & Dr. Prash Puspanathan <i>The Use of Virtual Reality in Psychedelic Psychotherapy p54</i>
12:20 PM – 12:30 PM	Chair Roundup
12:30 PM – 1:15 PM	Lunch
Concurrent Session 4:	
1:15 PM – 2:30 PM	Critical Reflections on Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy
1:15 PM – 1:20 PM	Chair: Prof. Susan Rossell
1:20 PM – 1:35 PM	Prof. Susan Rossell <i>Safety Considerations for Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy p56</i>
1:35 PM – 1:55 PM	Dr. David Spektor <i>A New Dawn: How Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy Can/Should Inspire a New Mental Health Paradigm p58</i>
1:55 PM – 2:10 PM	Dr. Julian Georges <i>Expert considerations in psychedelic-assisted therapy to treat mental health disorders in people under 18: a qualitative review p60</i>
2:10 PM – 2:25 PM	Dr. Nikola Ognyenovits <i>Antidepressants and Psychedelics? p62</i>
2:25 PM – 2:30 PM	Chair Roundup
2:30 PM – 3:00 PM	Afternoon Tea

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Panel Discussion with Dr. Nikola Ognyenovits, Dr. Emily Tunks, Dr. David Spektor, Dr. Esme Dark, Campbell Townsend, Sarah Pant and Claire Finkelstein <i>Patient Selection and Personalised Therapy Regimens - Psychological and Physical Factors p64</i>
4:10 PM – 4:30 PM	Conference Close: A/Prof. Vanessa Beesley & Prof. Murat Yücel

Workshop Room

9:30 AM – 10:30 AM	Workshop: Sarah Pant <i>Unfolding Phenomenological Experiences in Psychedelic Integration p66</i>
10:30 AM – 11:00 AM	Morning Tea
12:30 PM – 1:15 PM	Lunch
Concurrent Session 5:	
1:15 PM – 2:30 PM	Applications and Attitudes to Psychedelics
1:15 PM – 1:20 PM	Chair: A/Prof. Stephen Parker
1:20 PM – 1:30 PM	Ariana Elias <i>Ketamine-Assisted Psychotherapy for Treatment Resistant Depression and comorbid Severe and Enduring Eating Disorders p70</i>
1:30 PM – 1:40 PM	A/Prof. Shanthi Sarma <i>Psilocybin-Assisted Psychotherapy (PAP) in Public Mental Health Services in Australia: Challenges and Opportunities p72</i>
1:40 PM – 1:50 PM	Dr. Amber Domberelli <i>A comparative analysis of microdosing and prescription medications in mental health treatment p74</i>
1:50 PM – 2:00 PM	A/Prof. Stephen Parker <i>Exploring community and health professional attitudes towards psychedelics and psychedelic-assisted therapy in Australia p76</i>
2:00 PM – 2:10 PM	Aloysius Amos Lau & Sarah Catchlove <i>Perceptions of Peer Support Workers towards Psychedelic Assisted Therapy (PAT) p78</i>
2:10 PM – 2:20 PM	Hannah Adler <i>“If we could bring in some other tools to really help with that emotional distress... then why wouldn't we embrace it?”: Healthcare Professionals on Psilocybin for Existential Distress in Cancer Patients p80</i>
2:20 PM – 2:30 PM	Chair Roundup
2:30 PM – 3:00 PM	Afternoon Tea

Concurrent Session 6:

3:00 PM – 3:55 PM	Insights and Trauma-Informed Approaches in Psychedelic Therapy
3:00 PM – 3:05 PM	Chair: Dr. Bianca Sebben
3:05 PM – 3:15 PM	Ashkan Agahi <i>Validation of the Reliable Experiences Scale: Measuring the Perceived Reliability of Psychedelic Experiences p82</i>
3:15 PM – 3:25 PM	Joshua Kugel <i>Insights on Psychedelics and Their Relationship with Therapeutic Effects p84</i>
3:25 PM – 3:35 PM	Dr. Ruben Laukkonen <i>Can We Trust Psychedelic Insights p86</i>
3:35 PM – 3:45 PM	Daniel Zalcberg <i>Psychedelic Somatic Interactional Psychotherapy: the use of cannabis assisted therapy for treating complex and relational trauma p88</i>
3:45 PM – 3:55 PM	Dr. Bianca Sebben <i>Psychedelic Integration and “Bad Trips: Trauma-Informed Integration for Managing Psychedelic Distress p90</i>
3:55 PM – 4.00 PM	Chair Roundup

Art Spaces

Soaring Together: A Collaborative Art Experience

Artist-in-Residence Shevaun Russell

Day 2: *The finished piece will be outstretched wings that attendees can stand in front of for a photo.*

Grounding Walk:

Artist-in-Residence Shevaun Russell

Sensory nature pieces -moss, sand, water, rocks, shells, feathers will be artfully displayed for participants to take a grounding walk. Guided by prompt cards participants will be invited to touch and feel the natural items.

AI Art Exhibition

A/Prof Vanessa Beesley

Dosed – Psilocybin Visions from The PARTING (Psilocybin-Assisted supportive psychoTherapy IN prolonged Grief) Trial

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ABSTRACTS

Day 1: Thursday, February 6, 2025

Keynote

Australia's World-First Psilocybin Studies: Treating Anxiety, Training Therapists, Transforming Polarisation

Paul Liknaitzky^{1,2}

1 Department of Psychiatry, School of Clinical Sciences, Monash University, Australia

2 School of Psychological Sciences, Monash University, Australia

Psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy has demonstrated promising safety and efficacy in treating depression, substance use disorders, and end-of-life distress. Although many trials report reductions in anxiety symptoms, no study to date has directly tested the effectiveness of this treatment for a primary anxiety disorder. In a randomized, active placebo-controlled study with 73 participants, we assessed the efficacy, safety, and tolerability of a brief psilocybin-assisted therapy protocol for Generalised Anxiety Disorder.

Relatedly, while psychedelic therapists often emphasize the importance of personal psychedelic experience for therapeutic competence, this has not previously been assessed. We conducted another world-first study focused on therapist training, with 14 therapist volunteers who completed a program of psilocybin with support as part of training, and reported changes in professional competencies.

Finally, psilocybin has been shown to increase perspective-taking, empathy, feelings of connectedness, and compassion. The potential for these effects to afford benefits in addressing group polarisation is intriguing, yet has not been tested. A planned study will be described, using psilocybin-assisted peace-building with leaders from polarised communities to improve out-group attitudes, relational dynamics, and social cohesion, thereby addressing critical risk factors for hostility and violence.

This presentation will outline the rationale, design, and key findings of two completed studies, highlighting clinical insights and lessons learned. It will also introduce a novel research program addressing the critical global issue of rising societal polarisation. By situating psilocybin research at the intersection of clinical innovation and social impact, these studies highlight the expanding horizon of psychedelic science—from clinical to professional to social applications.

Concurrent Session 1: Evidence, Innovations and Approaches in Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy

A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Psilocybin and MDMA for Mental Health Treatment: Influence of Dose, Therapeutic Support, and Concurrent Antidepressant Use on Treatment Outcomes

Lena K. L. Oestreich, PhD,^{1,2} Hugh McGovern, BSc,³ Zohaib Nadeem, BSc,⁴ Sarah Coundouris, PhD,¹ Stephen Parker, PhD^{4,6}

1 School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

2 Centre for Advanced Imaging (CAI) and Australian Institute for Bioengineering and Nanotechnology (AIBN), The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

3 Cairnmillar Institute, Melbourne, Australia

4 Faculty of Medicine, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

5 Metro North Mental Health, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Herston, Australia

6 Faculty of Medicine, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

Objectives: The therapeutic potential of MDMA and psilocybin in treating mental illness has garnered significant interest, highlighting the need to optimize dosing and treatment protocols. This meta-analysis assesses the effectiveness of MDMA- and psilocybin-assisted therapies for mental illnesses, focusing on the effects of dosage, therapeutic support, and concurrent antidepressant use on treatment outcomes.

Methods: Systematic searches were conducted on PubMed, Web of Science, and PsycINFO up to June 1, 2024. Eligible studies included randomized controlled trials and quantitative studies using MDMA or psilocybin for treating mental illnesses. Data were pooled using random-effects models, and analyses followed PRISMA guidelines.

Results: From 29,255 records, 25 studies were reviewed systematically, and 12 were included in meta-analyses (six MDMA trials for PTSD, six psilocybin trials for depression). MDMA-assisted therapy showed significant symptom reduction in PTSD both between-groups (Hedge's $g = 2.1$; $p < 0.001$, $I^2 = 80.29\%$) and within-groups (Hedge's $g = 0.72$; $p < 0.001$, $I^2 = 80.29\%$). Psilocybin-assisted therapy for depression showed significant within-group effects (Hedge's $g = 1.72$; $p < 0.001$, $I^2 = 92.65\%$), though the between-group analysis did not reach significance. Multivariate regressions suggested better outcomes with more integration sessions for both substances, while concurrent antidepressant use did not alter psilocybin outcomes. Blinding issues posed a risk of bias.

Conclusions: MDMA and psilocybin therapies show promise for PTSD and depression but require standardized protocols to optimize safety and efficacy. These therapies offer potential alternatives for patients with severe or treatment-resistant conditions.

Notes

Taking HEART: What should we do about climate-related PTSD?

Bennett-Levy, J.¹, Morley, K.², Beesley, V.³, Haber, P.⁴, Shakespeare-Finch, J.⁵, Atkinson, C.⁶, Michie, S.⁷, Schloss, J.¹, Baillie, A.², Bird, E., Wardle, J.¹, Matthews, V.², Laukkonen, R.¹, Hayes, I.¹, Vosz, M., Brymer, E., Pennell, M.¹, Jones, L.³, Lee, Y⁸. Y., Kirby, J⁹

1 Southern Cross University

2 University of Sydney

3 QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute

4 Royal Prince Alfred Hospital

5 Queensland University of Technology

6 We Al-li Pty Ltd

7 University College London

8 Monash University

9 The University of Queensland

This presentation will reflect on the mental health impacts of climate-related disasters over past 8 years in northern New South Wales, Australia. These years have seen 3 major floods, 2 seasons of bushfires, and the 3 hottest years on record. We'll describe the rationale, and evolution of the key elements for a 4-year stepped care clinical trial to address climate-related PTSD. The trial features two kinds of low intensity intervention: arts-based and nature-based compassion-focused groups. For the high intensity intervention, we have elected to trial group-based MDMA-assisted therapy and shall look to develop an innovative approach to advanced therapist training. Some initial challenges we face mounting this clinical trial in a small, highly networked, traumatised community will be described.

“Becoming Somebody Before Becoming Nobody”: How Somatic and Relational Approaches can inform MDMA-Assisted Psychotherapy

Peta Blaisdell¹ and Dr Emily Tunks¹

¹ The Clinical Psychedelic Lab at Monash University.

This presentation explores the potential of somatic (body-informed) and relational approaches in MDMA-assisted psychotherapy (MDMA-PAT) to impact significant mental health conditions stemming from developmental trauma. Early relational disruptions and events shape our sense of self and how we relate to others and our environment. Expanded states of consciousness can uniquely activate non-verbal and early relational developmental patterns, affective states, power imbalances, abuse, neglect and other schematic memory states. When combined with MDMA, somatic and relational therapeutic approaches may therefore offer profound opportunities to re-engage these critical social learning patterns that have significant implications for individual, familial and community well-being. In two MDMA-PAT for PTSD trial case studies, somatic psychotherapists Peta Blaisdell and Dr Emily Tunks highlight the co-regulation effects that seem to support developmental repair. This discussion focuses on how somatic and relational psychodynamic approaches can safely harness the intense relational dynamics that emerge during expanded states of consciousness, and in the aftermath, to foster new, healthy developmental experiences. Which raises an important research question: could somatic and psychodynamically informed MDMA-PAT help prepare individuals suffering conditions other than PTSD, for further psychedelic treatments such as Psilocybin? Grounded in attachment, somatic and neurobiological developmental theories, plus relational therapeutic frameworks, Peta and Emily discuss the importance of PAT therapists’ ongoing understanding of their own developmental material in this emotionally challenging, multi-state work. By increasing our own somatic awareness, therapists could strengthen the dyadic therapeutic relationship, minimise risk of burn-out and contribute to a participant’s continuing developmental repairs beyond dose day.

MDMA- Assisted Therapy (MDMA-AT) for PTSD and Severe and Enduring Eating Disorders (SE-ED)

Ariana Elias¹

1 Tikvah Clinic

Background: Individuals with eating disorders and PTSD have significantly greater symptom severity, treatment dropout rates, poorer prognosis, and lower quality of life. Severe and enduring eating disorders (SE-ED) encompass longstanding presentations of eating disorders with a number of unsuccessful treatments attempts and is among the most impairing of all mental illnesses. Integrated trauma-informed treatment approaches are needed to support individuals with these co-occurring conditions. It is hypothesized that food restriction and purging as experienced in SE-ED might shield individuals from trauma-related thoughts, feelings and memories and control dysregulated emotions related to traumatic events. As a result, recovery remains very difficult. MDMA is associated with unique psychopharmacological effects, including: 1) reduced fear, 2) enhanced wellbeing, 3) increased sociability/extroversion, 4) reduced self-criticism, 5) increased compassion for self/others, 6) increased interpersonal trust, and 7) alert state of consciousness. Aim: Assess whether the anxiolytic and prosocial effects of MDMA-AT can help mitigate the avoidance and hyperarousal associated with PTSD and SE-ED and support individuals to heal from their trauma and recover from their eating disorder

Methods: Quantitative and qualitative data from five individuals receiving MDMA-AT for PTSD and SE-ED will be presented. All individuals are expected to receive three MDMA-AT sessions with adequate preparation and integration. All individuals are long standing patients of the principal investigator.

The Experience of a Community-Based Ketamine-Assisted Psychotherapy Practice in Brisbane

Nikola Ognyenovits

Ketamine is widely used around the world. It has multiple therapeutic applications, as an anaesthetic, a pain medicine, an antidepressant and a psychedelic. It is also popular in the party scene along with many other psychedelic medicines. In some countries in particular the USA ketamine has an established role in dozens community-based psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy centres. Is it just a poor substitute, a poor cousin in place of the classical psychedelics or does it have its own place in psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy?

Dr Nikola Ognyenovits delivered over ninety ketamine-assisted psychotherapy sessions with patients selection, preparation and integration sessions in a community-based practice in Brisbane over four years. He will discuss the pitfalls and what has he learnt about running a psychedelic-assisted therapy program in the community.

Concurrent Session 2: Transformative Therapies and Professional Insights

Does turning into a frog, walking with blue bears or your deceased mother's touch help?: Findings from a world-first psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy trial for prolonged grief disorder.

T J Kennedy^{1,2}, F Maccallum², S Parker^{1,3,4}, M Ross⁵, R J Harvey⁶, J Sarris^{7,8,9,10}, D Perkins^{7,8,11}, S L Rossell^{5,8}, J Bennett-Levy^{1,12}, R E Neale^{1,4}, H Beebe¹, N Roset¹, M Malt¹, B Sebben^{1,13}, K Mallie^{1,13}, J Hart¹, J Strobel^{14,15}, V L Beesley^{1,2,16}

1 Psychedelic Medicine and Supportive Care Lab, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, Brisbane, Australia.

2 School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

3 Metro North Mental Health, Brisbane, Australia.

4 Faculty of Medicine, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

5 St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne, Australia.

6 Enosis Therapeutics, Melbourne, Australia.

7 Psychae Institute, Melbourne, Australia.

8 Centre for Mental Health, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia.

9 NICM Health Research Institute, Western Sydney University, Westmead, Australia.

10 The Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia.

11 School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia.

12 Faculty of Health, Southern Cross University, Lismore, Australia.

13 IPAT (Indigenous Psychedelic-Assisted Therapies) Organisation, Brisbane, Australia

14 Consumer Representative

15 Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, Adelaide Medical School, The University of Adelaide

16 School of Nursing, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.

Background: Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD) represents a substantial public health issue, especially in oncology settings where it affects up to 30% of bereaved carers. Current treatments are lengthy and up to 50% of people continue to experience clinically significant grief reactions. Recent literature and trials treating related disorders suggest psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy may hold promise for PGD.

Objectives: We aim to investigate feasibility, safety, acceptability, participant experience, and participant-reported therapeutic effects over a 12-month follow-up period.

Methods: The PARTING Trial is a world-first open-label trial of psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy as a treatment for PGD. Over a five-week intervention period, up to 15 bereaved cancer carers will undergo three preparatory psychotherapy sessions before receiving psilocybin (25mg) alongside non-directive supportive guidance, followed by four integrative psychotherapy sessions. Feasibility will be assessed through recruitment/retention rates and completion of follow-up assessments.

We will evaluate the safety of the intervention by documenting adverse events over 12 months and comparing physiological measures (e.g., haematology, electrocardiogram) recorded immediately before and one day after the psilocybin dose. Semi-structured interviews with participants and trial therapists will assess the acceptability and therapeutic potential of the treatment. Quantitative participant-reported measures of therapeutic effects that may be investigated in a future full-scale trial are also being collected; these include grief severity, depression, anxiety, grief avoidance, psychological flexibility, connectedness, and quality of life.

Findings: This presentation will share interim results (up to 6-months). We will also explore in-depth participants' descriptions of their psilocybin experience (depicted in AI-generated artwork).

Notes

Leveraging Nursing Skills in Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy: Building Safe and Trusting Spaces

Natalie Roset¹, Hanna Beebe¹, Stephen Parker^{1,2,3}, Fiona Maccallum⁴, Rachel E Neale^{3,5}, Tom J Kennedy^{1,4}, Vanessa L Beesley^{1,4,6}

1. Psychedelic Medicine and Supportive Care Lab, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, Brisbane, Australia.
2. Metro North Mental Health, Brisbane, Australia.
3. Faculty of Medicine, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.
4. School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.
5. Cancer Aetiology and Prevention Lab, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, Brisbane, Australia.
6. School of Nursing, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.

Background: Nurses are among the most trusted professionals, with nursing practice rooted in patient-centred and holistic care. The Caritas Psychedelic Nursing Framework of human caring science merges the elements of nursing care and psychedelic-assisted therapy. This reflective presentation by nurses involved in the Psilocybin-Assisted supportive psychoTherapy IN the treatment of prolonged Grief (PARTING) Trial aims to illustrate how nursing principles and skills aligned with the PARTING trial. We also examine participants' perceptions of the nurses' involvement.

Methods: The PARTING intervention involved three preparation, one psychoactive dosing, and four integration sessions. Nurses were co-therapists along with psychologist in all eight sessions. Using the Caritas Psychedelic Nursing Framework, presenters draw on their nursing experience, insights from the PARTING Trial, and qualitative participant feedback to demonstrate nurses' suitability for this work.

Results: Nurses contributed throughout the trial, involved in screening, physiological measures, medical monitoring, and fostering strong participant connections. Participants highlighted the nurses' role in creating a safe space; one participant shared, "*[Nurse 1] just has a very warm way, for me personally, I felt connected to her instantly. I could see that she cared about me and that makes you feel safer.*" Another said "*I can't sing the praises enough for [Psychologist 1] and [Nurse 2] just so there's so much caring involved, [...], it was very liberating to be able to feel comfortable expressing such strong emotion.*"

Conclusions: Nurses should be considered to expand workforce capacity and help integrate psychedelic-assisted therapies into broader healthcare systems, maximising patient safety and support.

Co-therapy in psychedelic-assisted therapy: translational insights from participant experiences.

Rachel Ham^{1,2}, John Gardner^{3,4}, Adrian Carter^{2,4}, Paul Likhaitzky^{1,2}

1. Department of Psychiatry, School of Clinical Sciences, Monash University, Australia

2. School of Psychological Sciences, Monash University, Australia

3. School of Social Sciences, Monash University

4. Monash Bioethics Centre and School of Philosophical, Historical and Indigenous Studies, Monash University

In Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy (PAT), research and clinic protocols involve some form of psychological support, typically delivered by two trained ‘co-therapists.’ Cotherapy is rarely utilised in general psychotherapy and the use of dyads in PAT is often considered by people not working as PAT therapists to primarily be a practical measure (e.g. safety, providing continuous supervision and support during long dosing sessions). However, this clinical design feature creates a distinct relational dynamic that influences interaction, roles, and communication patterns. This can be explored through microsociological theory, which suggests that cotherapy is likely to impact the therapeutic experience in significant ways. This research draws from patient experiences of cotherapy within a large clinical trial of psilocybin-assisted therapy for participants with Generalised Anxiety Disorder. Based on a substantial body of longitudinal qualitative interviews, these findings represent the first empirical exploration of participant experiences with cotherapy within PAT. Results suggest that cotherapy introduces a range of novel relational dynamics into the therapeutic milieu, enhances resilience to therapeutic rupture, and both complexifies and stabilizes the therapeutic environment. This research offers translational insights into the nuanced benefits and challenges of cotherapy that PAT clinicians and service providers can harness and manage to optimise a unique and effective therapeutic experience.

The Benefits of Psychedelic Therapists and Researchers having Psychedelic Experiences

Tram Nguyen

Background: Psychedelics have been used by humans through ancient times. The latest manifestation of Western use is the clinical research trial settings, is vastly different from Indigenous use in communities where traditional healers spend many years working with plant medicine, and ingest it with participants in ritual settings. Therapists having their own psychedelic experiences was commonplace in the 1960s and 1970s. There are similar models of mind therapies and psychotherapies, which embed a self-experience of the therapy modality into credentialed training, such as Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR), mindfulness and psychoanalytic psychotherapy. A recent consensus statement from 27 individuals reported that “Personal experience with psychedelics should not be required for training, certification, or licensure.” (1) This statement was made without supporting empirical evidence. The limited research describes the benefits of therapists having psychedelic experiences, and not the converse.

Objectives: To describe the benefits of psychedelic therapists and researchers having psychedelic experiences, and the socio-political context, which has contributed to questioning these practices and devaluing of a therapists’ psychedelic experiences.

Method: Narrative review of the literature, and presentation of a lived experience.

Conclusion: Research protocols should consider exploring the benefits of psychedelic experiences for therapists and researchers, either through the inclusion of therapist/ researcher surveys or facilitate therapists and researchers to have the option of a psychedelic experience without legal repercussions and reputational risk.

1. McGuire AL, Cohen IG, Sisti D, et al. Developing an Ethics and Policy Framework for Psychedelic Clinical Care: A Consensus Statement. JAMA Netw Open. 2024;7(6):e2414650. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.14650

How the Internal Family Systems Model might work for Altered States of Consciousness

Jonathan Hart¹

1 Psychedelic Medicine and Supportive Care Lab, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, Brisbane, Australia.

Background: Internal Family Systems (IFS) is a trauma-informed psychological framework which is gathering popularity for assisting people with emotional wounding, resolving the burdened parts of us in the process. It operates from the notion that we develop our parts because of multiple internal interactions throughout our lives, as a reaction to the external situations we experience. Therefore, each part is working from a place of protection and is inherently trying to make a positive contribution to the individual. The model also states that everyone has a ‘True Self’, an internal energy with deep wisdom that is calm, compassionate and capable of offering healing to our burdened parts. IFS attempts to embrace three major paradigms: 1) Multiplicity of the Mind; 2) Systems Thinking; 3) Spirituality

Objective: This talk will explore how altered states (including psychedelic ones) may give us immediate access to our parts, our internal family system as well as allows us to meet the Self? Furthermore, it will examine the three major paradigms within IFS and how they can reliably assist people undergoing psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy to be better prepared and to be more skilful in navigating and integrating these experiences?

Conclusion: Our internal landscape is shaped by the complex interplay of various voices, thought patterns, and emotions, much like the dynamics of our external relationships with others. By shifting these internal elements into more balanced and less extreme roles, we can cultivate a deeper sense of authentic joy, peace, and connectedness. This integrative approach highlights the importance of inner harmony in fostering spiritual well-being and personal growth.

Concurrent Session 3: The Psychedelic Revival and Ecosystem

Psychedelics in addiction research and treatment: Social and ethical implications

Tony Barnett¹, John Gardner², Leanne Hides¹, Adrian Carter^{2,3}

1 National Centre For Youth Substance Use Research, School of Psychology, The University of Queensland;

2 Monash Bioethics Centre, Faculty of Arts, Monash University;

3 School of Psychological Sciences, Monash University

Psychedelic therapies have been labelled as a potential breakthrough treatment for alcohol and other drug addiction. Contemporary clinical trials aim to extend a historical scientific focus on psychedelics to treat what are framed as treatment refractory addictions (e.g., psilocybin for alcohol use disorder). Although Australia has moved to fast track the translation of psychedelics to clinical practice for depression and PTSD, concerns have been raised about how psychedelic treatments might be translated to treat addiction, with resultant benefits or harms impacting different groups in society affected by addiction. People seeking addiction treatment have been targeted by dubious for profit clinics promoting psychedelic “cures” to their addictions at significant personal costs and harm with little evidence of their efficacy and limited regulatory oversight. Addressing these concerns, this study explores the social and ethical implications of psychedelics in addiction research and treatment. We examine how the authority of neuroscience bolsters psychedelics as a breakthrough intervention and explore issues concerning equitable access to clinical trials. We explore how people experiencing addiction are excluded from psychedelic treatments in Australia, and in view of the burden of disease of addiction, critically question whether public funding should be diverted to existing evidence-based treatments. Guided by a responsible research and innovation framework, we argue that there is an urgent need to ensure that the translation of psychedelics to practice is conducted in an ethical way, that promotes the wellbeing of a large cohort of Australians seeking addiction treatment.

The Psychedelic Ecosystem: Regulation, Funding and Psychedelic Capitalism

Panel Discussion with Dr. Prash Puspanathan, Dr. Paul Liknaitzky & Dr. Tony Barnett

Psychedelics and their therapeutic use have progressed from being a (scientific) field and into an industry. The mandate of stewardship has thus been unconsciously passed from science to the capital markets; from clinicians and researchers to CEOs, Venture Capitalists and regulatory agencies. The field has thus become amenable to a range of forces (fiscal, geopolitical, social trends) outside of the control of those working at it's coal face. Equally, it has become permeable to cross-industry influences, such as technology with the notable influence of artificial intelligence, pharmaceuticals, social media, even the military industrial complex. This has effects on the academic landscape of psychedelics but also clinician attitudes and processes as well as the contextual influences that form a broader view of a patient's "setting". In this fireside chat, Dr Prash P, Paul Liknaitzky & Tony Barnett discuss the higher order forces at play dictating the evolution of the psychedelic industry and some of the considerations that are imperative for macro-level understanding of what psychedelic therapy could start to look like tomorrow.

Workshop 1: An Introduction to the Indigenous Psychedelic Assisted Therapy (IPAT) Model

Jem Stone¹, Kirt Mallie^{1,2}, Dr. Bianca Sebben^{1,2}

1. IPAT (Indigenous Psychedelic Assisted Therapies) Organisation, Australia
2. Psychedelic Medicine and Supportive Care Lab, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, Brisbane, Australia.

Overview:

This workshop introduces the Indigenous Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy (IPAT) model, emphasising community-oriented healing and cultural responsiveness. Participants will explore how Indigenous Knowledge Systems can inform psychedelic therapy and mental health practices, contrasting these approaches with Western individualistic paradigms.

The session will begin with a presentation summarising key insights from the opinion piece *Psychedelic Medicine and Cultural Responsiveness: A Call for Indigenous Engagement in Australian Clinical Trials and Practice* (ANZJPH, 2024). Facilitators will then guide participants through the core principles of the IPAT model, with a focus on allyship, community healing, and collective well-being.

Objectives:

1. Understanding Indigenous Knowledge Systems
Learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing, and how these differ from Western mental health frameworks and research methodologies.
2. Decolonising Mental Health Care
Explore the lasting impacts of colonialism on intergenerational trauma and discover strategies to decolonise mental health care, making it inclusive and respectful of Indigenous cultures.
3. Connection to Country
Understand the critical role of community and connection to Country in fostering social and emotional well-being for Indigenous peoples.
4. Community Healing and Collective Wellbeing
Examine the importance of community-based healing practices and collective approaches to well-being over individualistic treatment models.

Expected Outcomes:

- 1. Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in Research
Participants will gain insight into the ethical necessity of involving Indigenous peoples as active partners in research, co-designing projects that respect Indigenous sovereignty and knowledge systems.
- 2. Respecting Indigenous Sovereignty
Understand the importance of Indigenous self-determination in decision-making processes related to mental health and psychedelic therapy.

This workshop offers a unique opportunity to engage with culturally responsive approaches to psychedelic-assisted therapy, fostering dialogue and allyship to support inclusive and effective mental health care practices.

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Workshop 2: Deepening PAT Through Somatic Techniques and Metaphor

Dr. Esme Dark¹ & Campbell Townsend¹

¹ Clinical Psychedelic Research Lab, Monash University

Objectives:

In the rapidly evolving field of psychedelic-assisted therapy, clinicians are continually seeking innovative approaches to deepen the therapeutic process and facilitate lasting transformation. This workshop, led by two experienced clinical psychologists specializing in psychedelic-assisted therapy, explores the potent synergy between metaphorical language and somatic awareness in enhancing therapeutic outcomes. Metaphors serve as bridges between the ineffable experiences often encountered in altered states and our everyday understanding. They provide a rich, multisensory language that can capture the essence of profound insights and emotions that may otherwise elude verbal expression. Simultaneously, the body holds a wealth of information and wisdom, often accessed more readily during psychedelic experiences. By intentionally weaving together metaphorical exploration and somatic therapy approaches, therapists can create a more holistic and integrative approach to healing.

Activities:

This interactive workshop will guide participants through theoretical foundations and practical applications of this combined approach. We will begin by examining the neuroscience behind metaphor comprehension and its relationship to emotional processing and memory reconsolidation. Participants will then be introduced to techniques for eliciting and working with client-generated metaphors, with a particular focus on those arising from psychedelic experiences. We will draw on somatic therapy principles explored through guided exercises designed to enhance bodily awareness and its connection to emotional states and resourcing. We will demonstrate how to seamlessly integrate somatic interventions with metaphorical exploration, allowing for a deeper embodiment of insights and a more complete processing of challenging emotions or experiences.

Expected outcomes:

By the end of this workshop, participants will have gained a comprehensive understanding of how to harness the combined power of metaphor and somatic experience in their therapeutic work. They will leave equipped with practical skills to enhance communication, deepen emotional processing, and facilitate more profound and lasting therapeutic outcomes in psychedelic-assisted therapy. This workshop is suitable for mental health professionals, researchers, and students interested in expanding their therapeutic toolkit and exploring innovative approaches in the field of psychedelic-assisted therapy.

Workshop 3: Wayapa® Wuurk - An Earth Connection Practice Based On Ancient Indigenous Wisdom

Jem Stone¹ & Kirt Mallie^{1,2}

1 IPAT (Indigenous Psychedelic Assisted Therapies) Organisation, Australia

2 Psychedelic Medicine and Supportive Care Lab, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, Brisbane, Australia.

Background:

Living in harmony with their environment is what sustained Australian Aboriginal people to be one of the world's oldest, continuous living culture – for over 100,000 years! Yet today, for most of us, we have become disconnected from our environment, from our tribe, from our food and from our Spirit.

Wayapa® Wuurk is first internationally accredited Aboriginal wellness modality, an earth connection practice that is based on ancient Indigenous wisdom that focuses on taking care of the Earth as the starting point for creating Earth Mind Body Spirit well-being. Wayapa translates to 'Connection', Wuurk translates to "Earth".

Workshop Objectives:

1. To deepen understanding of Wayapa® Wuurk as an Aboriginal wellness modality and its focus on Earth Mind Body Spirit connection.
2. To explore the 14 Wayapa Wuurk Elements and their relevance to modern-day life as Earth custodians.
3. To foster a sense of connection to Mother Earth, self, and community.
4. To encourage practical action toward caring for the planet using ancient Indigenous wisdom.

Activities and Expected Outcomes:

During this workshop, you will be learning ways of integrating Ancient Wisdom into our modern day lives, by reconnecting back to Mother Earth through a combination of Earth mindfulness, narrative meditation, yarning and a series of 14 Wayapa Wuurk Elements with their physical movement flow. Together as modern-day Earth custodians may we all learn better ways to walk together, a little gentler on our beautiful, living and intelligent planet.

This workshop is being led by Jem Stone, a First Nations Woman and Wayapa Wuurk Practitioner and Trainer, who aims to inspire participants to walk in harmony with their environment, embodying the wisdom of the world's oldest continuous living culture while creating a healthier, more connected future.

Day 2: Friday, February 7, 2025

Workshop 4: Sound Journey Experiential

Kirt Mallie^{1,2}

1 IPAT (Indigenous Psychedelic Assisted Therapies) Organisation, Australia

2 Psychedelic Medicine and Supportive Care Lab, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, Brisbane, Australia.

Overview:

Everything is energy, whether manifesting as particles or waves, and at its core, all energy can be expressed through sound, frequency, or vibration. Sound and music therapy harness this universal principle, offering profound potential for healing. While some frequencies are imperceptible to the human ear, others can recalibrate, balance, or heal energy centres, systems, and even physical aspects of the body.

Activities:

Embark on an unforgettable journey of sacred sound and song in this immersive and experimental workshop. Participants are invited to fully surrender to the experience, allowing healing vibrations to flow through them. Alternatively, the sound journey can serve as a gateway to deep introspection, enabling the release of emotional or energetic blockages that no longer serve your well-being.

Instruments and Techniques:

The workshop features a dynamic combination of instruments and practices, including:

- Tibetan and crystal singing bowls
- Voice, toning, and mantra
- Medicine drum and rattles
- Gong and flute
- Harmonium
- Didgeridoo

Expected outcomes:

Experience the transformative power of sound as Kirt Mallie, a Mualgal man, Indigenous therapist, cultural educator, and spiritual teacher, guides you through this profound journey, offering medicine for the soul and healing for the body.

Keynote

Bridging Realities - Participant Experiences in Psilocybin-Assisted Psychotherapy at End of Life, and What the FDA Won't Hear About.

Dr. Margaret Ross¹

1 St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne, Australia.

This presentation delves into the profound yet 'unquantifiable' participant experiences emerging from the recent phase IIb psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy study for end of life distress at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne. Drawing from qualitative findings and clinical observations, it highlights the liminal and deeply personal journeys that transcend conventional outcome measures. By juxtaposing participant reflections with the 'gold standard' outcome assessments required by the FDA, the talk ponders the limitations of standard metrics in capturing the therapeutic depth of altered states. The broader need for re-imagining how we evaluate psychedelic assisted psychotherapy in clinical and regulatory context will be discussed.

The Use of Virtual Reality in Psychedelic Psychotherapy

Agnieszka Sekula¹ & Dr. Prash Puspanathan¹

1 Enosis Therapeutics, Melbourne, Australia

Use of Virtual Reality (VR) in combination with psychedelics has recently gained both corporate interest and increased use within the community for self-therapy. This demands academic evaluation which the authors responded to with a comprehensive analysis of the technical specifications for the use of VR in psychedelic therapy.

Our pioneering study in collaboration with Psychedelic Society Belgium explored the use of VR as a therapeutic tool and showed 90% acceptance, appropriateness and feasibility rates. Subjective reports from participants indicated that VR was particularly helpful in discerning between emotional and psychological elements that emerged during therapy. The same VR scenario has been evaluated via clinical application in collaboration with Ketamine Clinic as an adjunct to their standard ketamine protocol for MDD.

This talk summarizes a 4-year research examining the feasibility and limitations of the use of VR as a psychotherapy tool in combination with 1) psilocybin and 2) ketamine based on studies at Swinburne University, Australia and a clinical application at Ketamine Clinic in Poland. Qualitative and quantitative data will be presented. Limitations and potential side effects of this approach are explored.

Concurrent Session 4: Critical Reflections on Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy

Safety Considerations for Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy

Susan Rossell^{1,2}

1 Centre for Mental Health, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne Australia

2 Mental Health, St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne Australia

Background: There has been a surge of interest in psychedelic research, especially with regards to the therapeutic properties of these compounds. This has led to the emergence of psychedelic assisted psychotherapy (PAP). PAP is showing promise for a range of mental health conditions, including major depressive disorder and PTSD, leading to (perhaps premature) international changes in scheduling and regulatory policies in relation to psychedelics.

Objectives: This presentation will present the specific safety and ethical factors that need to be considered when engaging in PAP research and its implementation into clinical practice.

Methods: A review of relevant literature will be presented. This will be supplemented with case examples and evidence from my own extensive experience conducting clinical trials with a range of psychedelic compounds.

Findings: Researchers and clinicians have raised ethical concerns regarding PAP. Specific issues to be discussed include: i) the challenge of heightened expectations regarding the supposed transformative effects of psychedelics, ii) the unescapable unblinding in clinical trials, iii) the challenges of informed consent, iv) minimising conflicts of interest and grandiosity, v) risks of problematic interpersonal dynamics, vi) the complexities of the underground psychedelics movement, and vii) the processes that are involved in screening and eligibility for PAP.

Conclusions: To assure the safe and ethical clinical administration of psychedelics, we must develop, obtain consensus for, and disseminate rigorous ethical and practice standards. There are not yet globally-endorsed standards, but initial work has highlighted important factors to consider. Further research, and continued conversation, are required to refine best practices.

Notes

A New Dawn: How Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy Can/Should Inspire a New Mental Health Paradigm.

David Spektor¹

¹ Clinical Psychedelic Lab, Monash University

In the pursuit of more effective mental health treatments for complex PTSD and treatment resistant depression, these case studies explore the transformative potential of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy. Focusing on two clients' journeys— a first responder with PTSD undergoing MDMA-assisted psychotherapy, and an individual with treatment-resistant depression receiving psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy—these cases will speak to the limitations of current mental health diagnostic systems and treatments. Both of which often fail to capture the nuanced, underlying issues each individual presents.

The interventions—MDMA and psilocybin assisted psychotherapy—provided a unique therapeutic avenue by facilitating profound emotional breakthroughs, leading not only to significant symptom improvement but also began the process of healing deep-seated attachment wounds. These interventions proved instrumental in addressing the root causes of suffering, rather than merely alleviating surface symptoms.

The outcomes underscore not only the power of these treatments but also the potential of psychedelic-assisted therapies to shift the paradigm from a medicalized model of mental health to a more human understanding of suffering. By addressing emotional and relational wounds from our early years, these therapies offer a promising path for profound psychological healing. The lessons learned highlight the importance of Psychedelic assisted Psychotherapy in the future of mental health care and demand a more human-centered approach to suffering in our mental health system as a whole.

Expert considerations in psychedelic-assisted therapy to treat mental health disorders in people under 18: a qualitative review

J Georges^{1,2}, P Liknaitzky^{1,3}, S Sundram^{1,2,4}

1 Department of Psychiatry, School of Clinical Sciences, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

2 Mental Health Program, Monash Health, Melbourne, Australia

3 School of Psychological Sciences, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

4 Cabrini Outreach, Melbourne, Australia Background

Background: Clinical research into psychedelic-assisted therapy (PAT) has seen a resurgence in the last 20 years, with many studies showing promise in the treatment of certain mental health disorders. With rapid changes in psychedelic research and policy in adults, it is timely now to explore a set of considerations regarding the use of psychedelic therapies in people under 18. However, the literature on psychedelic-assisted therapy for young people is scant, and no study has synthesised the critical considerations that need to be addressed prior to such research programs commencing.

Objectives: To integrate key considerations from expert perspectives on the use of psychedelic-assisted therapy for mental health conditions in young people, towards guiding future research.

Methods: A qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with 16 experts with relevant academic, clinical, regulatory and/or industry expertise. Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling, and a template analysis was undertaken using thematic analysis alongside a predefined literature-informed framework. Interview data was coded via NVivo.

Results: Themes have been divided into conceptual and pragmatic sections. The conceptual framework focuses on ethical and theoretical considerations: arguments for and preliminary principles of paediatric PAT; enhanced informed consent; epistemic considerations; and neurodevelopmental considerations. The pragmatic framework outlines practical implementation challenges: screening considerations; therapeutic modalities and tailoring; preparation; dosing and pharmacological considerations; integration; and safety monitoring and risk mitigation.

Conclusions: Preliminary analyses suggest that these findings may inform future paediatric psychedelic-assisted therapy guidelines. Further implications include consideration of alternative therapeutic delivery models and higher cost requirements compared to adult PAT.

Antidepressants and Psychedelics?

Dr. Nikola Ognyenovits

Most psychedelic research protocols and therapy programs stipulate or advise participants and clients to stop antidepressants and other psychotropic drugs before embarking on psychedelic assisted therapies. Is it evidence based or only a theoretical precaution? There is little scientific data on how to best cease or wean off antidepressants. Product information has not been based on trial studies, rather, on consensus statements and assumptions. Real-world experience tells us different stories. Currently there is more recognition of antidepressant withdrawal syndrome which is frequently confused with relapse into depression. In this presentation I will discuss how neurophysiology and real-world experience could guide us to support clients coming off antidepressants and other psychotropic drugs.

Notes

Panel Discussion

Patient Selection and Personalised Therapy Regimens - Psychological and Physical Factors

Dr. Nikola Ognyenovits, Dr. Emily Tunks, Dr. David Spektor, Dr. Esme Dark, Campbell Townsend, Sarah Pant and Claire Finkelstein

As psychedelic-assisted therapy emerges as a transformative treatment for mental health conditions, patient selection and personalised therapy regimens are crucial for safety and optimising outcomes. The interplay between psychological features, physical health, and tailored therapeutic protocols remains an underexplored but essential area in advancing the field.

This panel brings together Emily Tunks, Esme Dark, Campbell Townsend, Sarah Pant, David Spektor and Nikola Ognyenovits, who have extensive firsthand experience in screening and delivering psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy (PAP). Recognising that PAP is not suitable for everyone with mental health challenges—and that it may even pose risks for some—the panellists will explore how predictive factors can guide patient selection and enhance therapeutic efficacy.

Key Discussion Points:

1. **Who Benefits from PAP?**
 - Identifying psychological and physical factors that predict positive or adverse outcomes.
 - Contraindications: when PAP might be harmful or ineffective.
2. **Balancing Structure with Flexibility:**
 - Adapting protocol-driven frameworks to accommodate individual patient needs.
 - Examples of tailoring therapy regimens to patient responses and safety.
3. **Ongoing Monitoring:**
 - The role of dynamic assessment during preparation, dosing, and integration phases.
 - How feedback may refine therapy regimens over time.
4. **Ethical Considerations:**
 - Addressing equity and accessibility while maintaining personalised care.

Managing expectations for patients and therapists in exploratory therapies. The panel will encourage active dialogue, inviting attendees to share real-world scenarios, challenges, and innovative ideas. The discussion aims to bridge theory and practice, highlighting opportunities for refining patient selection processes and therapeutic strategies in clinical trial and community settings.

Workshop 5:

Unfolding Phenomenological Experiences in Psychedelic Integration

Sarah Pant¹

¹ Monash Clinical Psychedelic Lab

In psychedelic journeys, clients encounter a vast array of phenomenological experiences that hold potential for profound insight and transformation. Returning to conventional therapy methods during integration has the potential to overlook the opportunity of these experiences. This workshop introduces approaches to engage these experiences fully, guiding practitioners in methods that reveal their deeper meaning and supporting clients in translating psychedelic insights into lasting therapeutic change.

Objectives: This workshop aims to provide PAT therapists with tools and techniques to:

1. Explore and deepen phenomenological experiences from psychedelic journeys through practical and interactive exercises.
2. Broaden participants' capacities to recognise and work with diverse experiences, including visual, somatic, movement, auditory, relational, environmental, and transpersonal to support meaning making for clients.
3. Cultivate recognition in accessing, unfolding, and integrating these experiences across the dimensions of everyday reality and levels of the unconscious.

Activities:

1. Case Study Analysis – Presentation of anonymised case examples from psychedelic therapy to illustrate different phenomenological channels and their unfolding process. Small group discussions will follow to explore insights and perspectives.
2. Channel Exploration Exercises – Guided activities will allow participants to experiment with visual, somatic, movement, auditory, relational, transpersonal and world channels, fostering direct experience and understanding of how these channels can reveal deeper layers of psychedelic content.
3. Phenomenological Mapping – Participants will explore how psychedelic experiences relate across the dimensions of everyday reality and levels of the unconscious 'dreaming'. This exercise will reflect on how meaning shifts across these layers and how such insights can aid integration.
4. Group Reflection and Synthesis – A facilitated group discussion to synthesize learning, where participants share reflections on how this might be applied in their own practice.

Expected Outcomes: By the end of the workshop, participants will:

1. Gain practical tools for working with and unfolding psychedelic experiences across multiple phenomenological channels.
2. Understand the concept of the levels of the unconscious dreaming and how it can support integration.
3. Leave with a deeper appreciation for the complex and layered nature of psychedelic integration and consider how to truly facilitate a client's emerging process/inner healer.
4. Enhance their own perceptual sensitivity to diverse phenomenological dimensions, contributing to a more embodied and holistic therapeutic approach

Notes

Concurrent Session 5: Applications and Attitudes to Psychedelics

Ketamine-Assisted Psychotherapy for Treatment Resistant Depression and comorbid Severe and Enduring Eating Disorders

Ariana Elias¹

1 Tikvah Clinic

Background: Given the potentially chronic refractory nature of eating disorders and the paucity of effective available treatments, there is an urgent need to identify novel approaches for this population. Due to its rapid and robust antidepressant effects, Ketamine, a noncompetitive N-methyl-D-aspartate receptor (NMDAr) antagonist, has been approved for treatment-resistant depression (TRD) and is being explored for other indications including severe and enduring eating disorders (SE-ED). Ketamine-Assisted Psychotherapy (KAP) involves using Ketamine's trance-inducing and pain-relieving properties to help individuals work with uncomfortable feelings and memories as well as having mind-body disconnection.

Aim: Outline the processes (screening, prep, dosing, integration) involved in KAP for patients with difficult to treat TRD and SE-ED. Provide case studies showcasing where KAP has been helpful and unhelpful. Explore reasons for KAP outcomes.

Methods: Since May 2023, Tikvah Clinic (Sydney, Australia) has been offering KAP to selected patients with TRD and SE-ED. Data was collected from five underweight and three weight restored women. All patients provided consent to be included in the presentation.

Results: All participants received between 3 and 12 KAP sessions, lasting 3hrs in duration followed by one integration session within 24 hrs of receiving KAP. Three underweight patients gained weight. Five patients remained weight stable. All participants tolerated the treatment well.

Key findings: Preliminary findings suggest the potential benefits of KAP as a novel treatment for TRD and ED given its tolerability and suitability for outcomes.

Psilocybin-Assisted Psychotherapy (PAP) in Public Mental Health Services in Australia: Challenges and Opportunities

Shanthi Sarma^{1,2}, Sarah Walker¹, Emmily Bueno De Mesquita¹, Catherine Donald¹, Laura McCosker¹, Sigrun Gutjahr¹

1 Gold Coast Health, Gold Coast, Australia

2 Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine, Bond University, Gold Coast, Australia

Objectives: Evidence from Australian and international studies increasingly supports the efficacy, safety, and acceptability of psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy (PAP) for the treatment of complex mental health conditions. However, PAP is not currently available in public mental health services in Australia. This presentation critically discusses the challenges of delivering PAP in public services and highlights opportunities for the establishment of PAP research.

Methods: We draw on the research and clinical experience of the presentation team with novel treatments for complex mental illness, including PAP, in one Australian public mental health service.

Findings: There are unique challenges with delivering PAP in public mental health services. A single PAP session requires a full day of clinical time, a considerable demand in a system experiencing significant shortages of mental health clinicians. Concerns persist among clinicians and administrators that psilocybin is unsafe, reinforced by previous legislative bans. Concerns also remain about potential serious adverse reactions to psilocybin, including psychosis and trauma. However, public services are well-placed to provide rapid access to multidisciplinary care if required by PAP consumers. They provide rigorous clinical governance, ethical oversight, and research infrastructure. PAP services in the public system will ensure the treatment is available to consumers who might otherwise be unable to access it due to prohibitive private costs.

Conclusions: PAP has exciting potential for the treatment of complex mental health conditions, but its broad clinical application is premature. Currently, there is a need for commitment and investment to establishing PAP research in the public mental health system.

Notes

A comparative analysis of microdosing and prescription medications in mental health Treatment

Amber Domberelli¹

1 RMIT University

Objectives: This research explores community understandings of the difference between microdosing and prescription medication as a treatment for mental ill health.

Methods: This mixed-methods study used semi-structured interviews with 10 participants to inform survey questions in the 2021 Global Drug Survey. Quantitative data from 33,220 respondents assessed microdosing (n = 1,379) and prescription medication use for mental health (n = 267).

Results: Participants reported mixed experiences with prescription medication, citing unwelcome side effects and poor relief, while microdosing was preferred due to better alignment with their values. Prescription medication was viewed negatively by many participants as it was “unnatural”, it led to significant undesired personality changes, it felt like a ‘band aid’ solution that did not solve problems, prevented authentic emotional responses and feelings, and led to feelings of judgement, stigma and being labelled as mentally ill. Conversely, microdosing was viewed positively by many of the participants, because it was natural, not ‘addictive’, allowed authentic emotion to be experienced, enabled the participants autonomy over their health and associated treatment methods, and provided a release from labels associated with being treated for mental ill health.

Conclusions: Participants viewed microdosing as a more authentic and empowering alternative to prescription medications, appreciating that it is a ‘natural’ treatment modality, which also, for many, aligns with personal values. In contrast, prescription medications were often perceived as stigmatizing, ineffective, and emotionally limiting, highlighting a shift toward mental health treatments that promote autonomy, emotional expression, and authenticity.

Notes

Exploring community and health professional attitudes towards psychedelics and psychedelic-assisted therapy in Australia

Stephen Parker^{1,2}, Lena Oestreich¹, Zohaib Nadeem¹, Hugh McGovern¹

1 The University of Queensland, St Lucia, Queensland, Australia

2 Metro North Mental Health, The Prince Charles Hospital, Chermside, Queensland, Australia

Background: Regulatory changes in Australia have increased the opportunities for research and future implementation of psychedelic-assisted therapy. Understanding the knowledge towards this treatment is relevant to considering feasibility and acceptability.

Objectives: Describing and exploring knowledge and attitudes towards psychedelics and psychedelic-assisted therapy held by the community and health professions (general practitioners, psychiatrists, and psychologists).

Methods: Cross-sectional surveys (2023-24) targeting (1) Australian community members with and without a history of mental illness and (2) health practitioners (general practitioners, psychiatrists, and psychologists). Community recruitment was facilitated by the Prolific research platform (n=502, 65.4% self-identifying as having a mental illness). Health practitioner recruitment was facilitated through advertisement through professional organisations, networks, and snowballing. All participants completed the Attitudes on Psychedelics Questionnaire and the Basic Knowledge of Psychedelics Test.

Findings: For the community sample, favourable views on the potential of psychedelics were identified. Positive attitudes were more likely to be expressed by people with an experience of mental illness and/or psychedelic use. Analysis of the findings from the health practitioner is in the process of being finalised.

Conclusions: Community attitudes are generally supportive of the therapeutic potential of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy. Understanding the attitudes of clinicians will be critical in considering what evidence and education may be required if these approaches are expected to become a component of routine mental health care in the future.

Perceptions of Peer Support Workers towards Psychedelic Assisted Therapy (PAT)

Aloysius Amos Lau ^{1,2}, Sarah Catchlove ²

1 Clinical Psychedelic Lab, Monash University

2 Turning Point at Eastern Health Clinical School, Monash University

Introduction: Peer Support Workers (PSWs) are vital in Australia's Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) treatment framework, bridging patients and healthcare providers. Despite their key role, little is known about their attitudes toward Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy (PAT). Hence, this study aims to explore their attitudes, concerns and beliefs about PAT.

Methods: n = 33 Australian PSWs were recruited via convenience sampling and completed a survey on their attitudes, knowledge, and concerns about PAT.

Results: Most PSWs believe PAT deserves further research, are confident in its effectiveness and express strong interest in supporting clients undergoing PAT. While most reported understanding the subjective effects of psychedelic substances, they were less knowledgeable about the scientific literature and clinical aspects of PAT. Most PSWs agreed that greater knowledge about PAT would increase their willingness to recommend it and are keen to enhance their capabilities through training. 71% of respondents have personally used psychedelics, and 65% have had clients who used psychedelics. The most requested educational topics were about managing challenging experiences and understanding side effects and contraindications.

Discussion: PSWs hold positive attitudes toward PAT and are eager to support clients undergoing PAT. Addressing their educational needs—especially in clinical aspects and risk management—can enhance their confidence in recommending and supporting clients in research trials. Moreover, PSWs may be valuable in facilitating PAT. Although not currently part of PAT protocols, their unique client relationships suggest involving PSWs could enhance engagement and outcomes. Exploring their integration into PAT delivery represents a promising avenue for future research and protocol development.

“If we could bring in some other tools to really help with that emotional distress... then why wouldn’t we embrace it?”: Healthcare Professionals on Psilocybin for Existential Distress in Cancer Patients

Hannah Adler, Rebecca Filipic, Ki Kwon, Maria Gonzalez, Judith Lacey, Geraldine McDonald, Jerome Sarris, Maria Ftanou, Kasia Chmiel, Mitchell Low, Justin Sinclair, and Suzanne Grant

Introduction and objectives: Existential distress is commonly experienced by people with cancer, yet there are limited treatment options. The therapeutic potential for psilocybin assisted therapy (PaT) for this cohort is underexplored, with emerging literature showing clinical improvements on wellbeing. There is also limited knowledge on healthcare professionals (HCPs) attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of the use of PaT for existential distress, and their opinions for modes of delivery. Thus, HCPs and the potential of psilocybin was explored through this project.

Methods and analysis: Qualitative semi-structured interviews were used to investigate the attitudes of 11 HCPs, largely from cancer treatment centres such as Chris O’Brien Lifehouse and Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. The interviews were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Results and conclusions: Four key themes were identified: knowledge and education, preferred modes of care, barriers to psilocybin in care, and openness to explore further. Findings include that despite HCPs remaining interested in the potential of PaT, there are clear barriers being faced, knowledge gaps, and a desire for more research. HCPs also indicated a preference for PaT to be delivered in multidisciplinary teams. While some positioned this treatment as a last resort, others noted that there is a need for another ‘tool’ in the treatment of existential distress in cancer. Thus, PaT provides a hope for their patients. The results from this study in conjunction with future research on the topic has the potential to help inform clinical practice guidelines, policies, and lead to better patient outcomes and improved quality of care.

Concurrent Session 6: Insights and Trauma-Informed Approaches in Psychedelic Therapy

Validation of the Reliable Experiences Scale: Measuring the Perceived Reliability of Psychedelic Experiences

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Understanding the mechanisms of therapeutic change in psychedelic-assisted therapy is essential for optimising treatments and mitigating risks. Acute psychedelic experiences, particularly the occurrence of psychedelic-catalysed insight (PCI), are critical predictors of therapeutic outcomes. However, existing measures focus on the content of PCI without assessing their ‘Reliability’, or perceived veridicality—how true or real these experiences feel—which may be associated with therapeutic outcomes, representing a significant research gap. To address this, the Reliable Experiences Scale (RES) was developed and validated to measure the perceived Reliability of perspectives, emotions, ideas, and insights during the experience. This study presents the development and psychometric validation of the RES. A sample of 410 participants who had recently undergone a psychedelic experience completed the RES along with various measures. Factor analyses revealed two underlying dimensions of the RES: Truthiness, the conviction that one’s experiences reflect reality, and Hyper-realness, the sense that experiences feel more real than everyday life. These dimensions demonstrated predictive validity for improved well-being, suggesting that Reliability may be important for therapeutic outcomes. These findings position the RES as a novel tool to investigate whether the perceived Reliability of psychedelic experiences predicts long-term therapeutic benefits. This could inform personalised approaches and enhance treatment strategies that promote beneficial and reliable experiences while minimising risks associated with harmful beliefs.

Insights on Psychedelics and Their Relationship with Therapeutic Effects

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Insights are a common and powerful subjective experience that frequently occur during psychedelic experiences, and are often considered by clinicians and patients to be central to the therapeutic value of psychedelics, but this has not been systematically assessed. Insight refers to a sudden acquisition of knowledge or understanding that is strongly felt to be true or real. Here we present data from two studies on psychedelic catalysed insight (PCI) and its clinical relevance. In the first, a systematic review, we analysed data from 98 studies reporting insight following a psychoactive dose of a classic-psychedelic, to elucidate several aspects of PCI, including its prevalence, relationship to dose, time-course, and relationship to therapeutic outcomes in the context of mental health and wellbeing. Experiences of PCI were positively correlated with dose, and reached statistical significance in 43 of 46 (93%) studies that compared psychedelic and placebo conditions. Crucially, 25 of 29 studies (86%) found that PCI was associated with positive therapeutic outcomes, and this relationship was often stronger than mystical-type experiences, which have received more research attention. In the second study, we present data on the same aspects of PCI in a recent large-scale RCT of psilocybin assisted therapy for generalised anxiety disorder. Together, these works contribute to our understanding of the aspects of subjective experiences that drive psychedelic-related outcomes, and suggests that PCI is an important topic for the clinical practice of psychedelic therapies and for understanding the mechanisms of psychedelic therapy more broadly.

Notes

Can We Trust Psychedelic Insights?

Ruben Eero Laukkonen¹

¹ Southern Cross University

Insights during psychedelics are remarkably important for therapeutic progress. While insights can be a source of creativity, discovery, and healing, they can also mark the beginning of a delusional episode, or potentially entrench and perpetuate false beliefs. In this talk, I will discuss the findings of recent experiments comparing the subjective experience of psychedelic insights to those that happen in the course of ordinary life and in the laboratory. Our findings show that psychedelic insights are more intense, meaningful, impactful, and ineffable, than other insights. I will integrate these and other findings within a computational neuroscience theory called ‘false insights and beliefs under psychedelics’ (i.e., FIBUS). Put simply, the combination of intense insights and relaxed beliefs creates the profound potential for plasticity and change. However, this plasticity comes with the risk of lodging false or maladaptive beliefs via insight experiences. I will ground these ideas by discussing how we might mould a set and setting to improve the probability of adaptive insights.

Psychedelic Somatic Interactional Psychotherapy: the use of cannabis assisted therapy for treating complex and relational trauma.

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1 The Life Medicine Collective

2 Bond University

Psychedelic Somatic Interactional Psychotherapy (PSIP) is an innovative therapeutic approach that actively engages with altered states of consciousness induced by psychedelic medicines, namely cannabis and ketamine. Unlike traditional non-directive psychedelic therapy models, PSIP utilises specific somatic and relational interventions designed to work within primary consciousness - the evolutionary ancient, non-verbal domain accessed during psychedelic states.

PSIP centres on the concept of 'selective inhibition', a process that suppresses voluntary coping mechanisms while allowing involuntary autonomic nervous system responses to emerge and complete. This enables processing of trauma held in the body as a series of evolutionarily- conserved threat responses that underlie many mental health symptoms.

PSIP specifically targets dissociation through careful therapeutic guidance, making it particularly relevant for complex developmental trauma. The approach includes both directive elements in establishing therapeutic conditions and non-directive elements in allowing organic healing processes to unfold. A key innovation is the interactional component, where the therapist actively engages with transference material that emerges during sessions, providing opportunities for relational repair.

This presentation will present the PSIP methodology through a detailed case example showing how selective inhibition enables processing of traumatic memory and resolution of autonomic nervous system dysregulation. The case will illustrate how PSIP's unique combination of somatic awareness, relational engagement, and careful therapeutic guidance can maximise the healing potential of psychedelic states while maintaining scientific rigor throughout the approach.

Psychedelic Integration and “Bad Trips: Trauma-Informed Integration for Managing Psychedelic Distress

Bianca Sebben^{1,2}

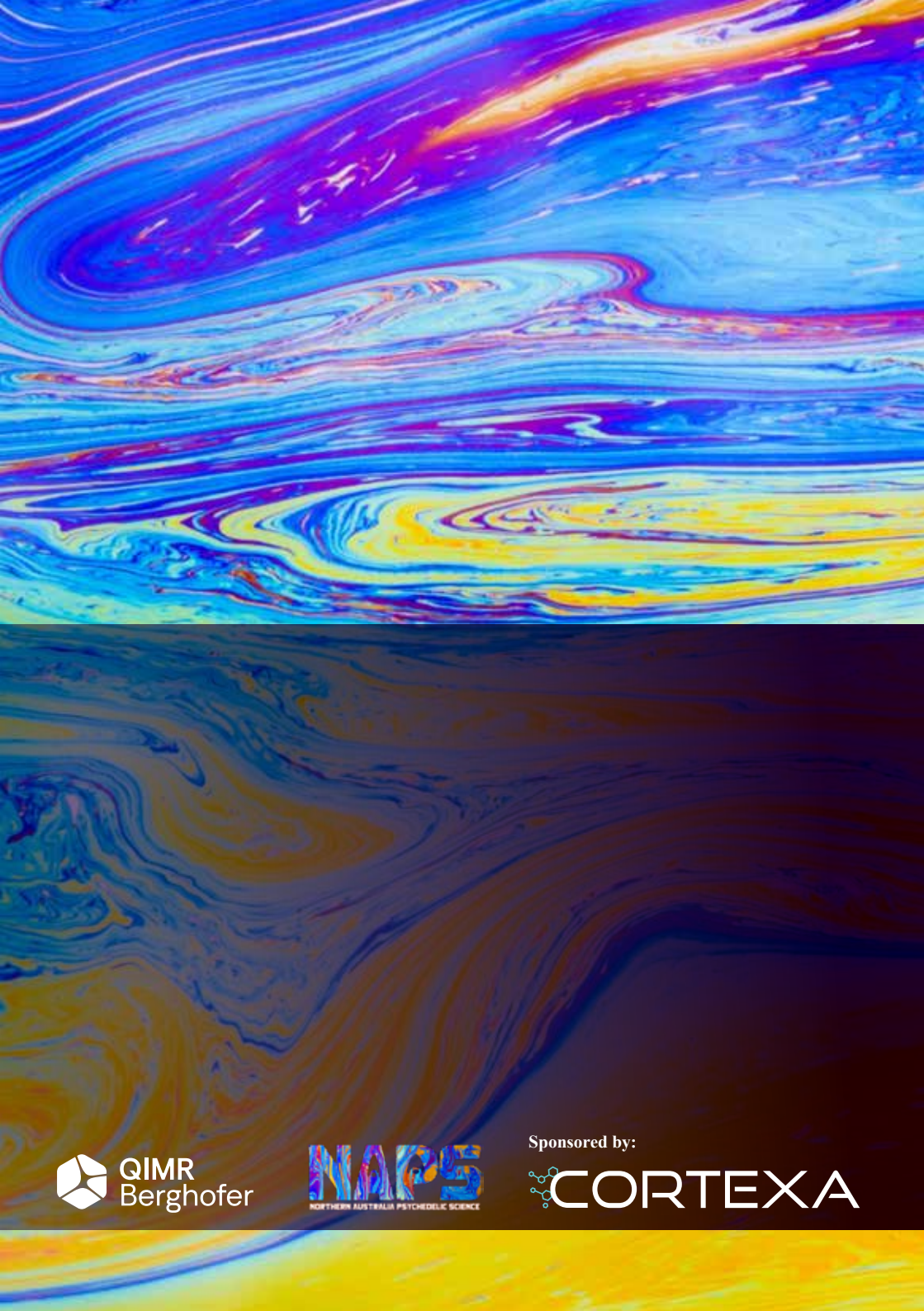
1 Conscious Insights

2 Psychedelic Medicine and Supportive Care Lab, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute

Following the ‘psychedelic renaissance’ of the mid 2000s, there has been a significant increase in people seeking out psychedelics in order to treat mental health conditions. This presents various challenges in the western context, where these medicines were not intended for treating mental health conditions, and where the West does not have the established cultural container for these medicines that are woven into the social and cultural fabric of various Indigenous cultures.

Whilst many people report positive experiences, some struggle to maintain the benefits long term and ultimately return to baseline, whilst others can have challenging experiences that they struggle to integrate in the aftermath. Even when supportive and attentive space-holding has occurred, many people report distress and difficulty following a psychedelic experience where the facilitator has not provided adequate preparation or integration support.

This presentation will discuss the various domains of integration including the emotional, somatic and transpersonal, and the importance of integration for maximising benefits and recovering from potentially harmful experiences. The presentation will look at working with recovered traumatic memories and destabilising dissociative responses such as depersonalisation and derealisation, as well as the challenges and risks of not integrating psychedelic experiences including integration including avoidance, ego inflation and spiritual bypass through repeated experiences.



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