



Written Testimony on the Medicinal Value of Psilocybin
Standing Committee on Health
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Introduction

Chairwoman Paulin, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on dangerous psychedelics like psilocybin that pose a severe public health threat to all New Yorkers.

I am a former three-time White House ONDCP appointee, serving as the President and CEO of the Foundation for Drug Policy Solutions (FDPS), a non-partisan nonprofit that I co-founded in 2022 with former Congressman Patrick Kennedy. FDPS advocates for health- and science-based policies that prioritize the well-being of society and its people. FDPS is the new sister organization for Smart Approaches to Marijuana (SAM), the organization Mr. Kennedy and I founded a decade ago to tackle the rise of the Big Marijuana industry.

We hope that members of this committee will prioritize the health and safety of their constituents and reject the false promises of psychedelic legalization.

Background

Public policy is quickly surpassing scientific research on psilocybin and psychedelics. There is no FDA approval or long-term safety data for psilocybin, which makes the drug's legalization risky for public health.

The FDA has been given full authority to approve and regulate safe and effective medications in the United States. FDA standards consider not only safety and effectiveness but also the ability to manufacture medications safely, reproduce safe conditions, and whether the risks outweigh the potential benefits. Currently, psychedelics like psilocybin have not met the FDA's standards. In fact, the [FDA](#) rejected the use of a psychedelic drug (MDMA) to treat PTSD in August 2024.

Many drugs receive Breakthrough Therapy Designation, and psychedelic drugs have had this status since 2017, but the evidence has not resulted in the FDA approval of any psychedelic drug.

Flawed Research

Research suggesting benefits of psychedelic drugs is mainly based on non-blind studies, meaning any positive results could be due to placebo effects. Many of these studies involve patients who have already experimented with psychedelics, which suggests they likely had a positive experience already or may have confirmation bias. Psychedelic research also largely controls for populations and conditions it is purported to treat, including excluding patients with a history of anxiety or depression.

In August 2024, an [FDA](#) panel rejected the use of MDMA to treat PTSD in therapeutic settings with a vote of 10-1. The FDA rejected Lykos' (MAPS) drug application for an MDMA-based medication to treat PTSD after determining that the risks outweighed the benefits and citing that MDMA's mind-altering effects made it nearly impossible to "blind" participants to whether they were receiving the drug or a placebo.

While this specific scenario involved MDMA, a different psychedelic, it is easy to see why a drug like psilocybin faces similar scrutiny.

Furthermore, a [study](#) published in the Journal of Affective Disorders looked at the efficacy of psychedelic-assisted therapy (PAT) compared to traditional antidepressants (tADs) for treating depression, specifically under "equal-unblinding" conditions where patients are aware of their treatment. The authors highlight that previous PAT trials often show inflated positive results because the intense effects of psychedelics make true blinding difficult, leading to a "functional unblinding" bias. By comparing PAT to open-label tAD trials—where patients also know their treatment—the study aims to provide a more realistic assessment.

The findings reveal no clinically meaningful difference in effectiveness between PAT and open-label tADs, suggesting that much of PAT's perceived superiority in other studies may be due to the significant impact of patient expectancy and a "know-cebo" effect in placebo groups of blinded PAT trials, rather than a superior pharmacological effect.

Health-Related Harms of Psilocybin

Psilocybin can pose serious risks to mental health, including an increased risk of [psychosis](#), [persistent hallucinations](#), and even [suicide](#). One [study](#) found that 39% of psilocybin users rated the experience as one of "the top five most challenging experiences" of their lives, and 11% noted it put themselves "or others at risk of physical harm."

Public policy is rapidly outpacing the science on psilocybin. There is no FDA approval or long-term safety data for psilocybin, which makes legalization of the drug risky for public health.

Psilocybin may help some individuals with certain conditions in the future, but there is not enough evidence to support psilocybin as a medication. In 2023, the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense [guidelines](#) for managing PTSD stated that there was insufficient evidence to recommend psilocybin for PTSD treatment. The American Psychiatric

Association has made a similar [statement](#): “There is currently inadequate scientific evidence for endorsing the use of psychedelics to treat any psychiatric disorder.”

One dangerous side effect of psilocybin is Hallucinogen Persisting Perception Disorder ([HPPD](#)), a condition in which a sober individual reexperiences the effects of a hallucinogen they had previously taken. Re-intoxication can occur months or even years after the initial use. Symptoms include visual disturbances, disorganized thinking, paranoia, and mood changes. Individuals experiencing HPPD could be driving, taking a walk in the park, or even lying in bed when suddenly they begin to reexperience aspects of their previous drug use.

In [2023](#), an Alaska Airlines pilot experienced an HPPD episode and attempted to shut down the plane's engine mid-flight. It was later learned that the pilot had taken psilocybin [48](#) hours earlier.

Recommendations

Lawmakers should oppose attempts from the psychedelic industry to promote unproven treatments to New Yorkers.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before this Committee. I urge the members to prioritize the health of New Yorkers and avoid normalizing the use of unproven hallucinogenic drugs. The truth is that medicine based on popular opinion over scientific evidence is a mistake. We should rely on science and research, which have not supported the claim that psychedelics are a safe or effective treatment. The effort to legalize psychedelics is fueled by a profit-driven industry that could make billions if these drugs are approved. New Yorkers deserve genuine treatment, not empty promises.