

Top Health Official Cites Evidence of Psilocybin's Benefits

NIH Director Highlights Growing Evidence for Psilocybin as a Potential Therapy for Mental Health Conditions

Monica Bertagnolli, the Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), has recently highlighted the increasing body of evidence suggesting that psilocybin, a compound found in “magic mushrooms,” could emerge as a novel therapy for substance misuse, depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions. While Bertagnolli emphasized that the NIH does not recommend psilocybin for recreational use due to its associated health risks, she acknowledged the promising results from early studies on its therapeutic potential.

Brain Plasticity and Mental Health

One of the key findings from the studies supported by the NIH involves the impact of psilocybin on brain plasticity. According to Bertagnolli, under controlled conditions, psilocybin’s effects on the brain may be harnessed in the future to help treat mental health disorders. “There’s growing evidence that—under the right conditions—its effects on the brain might be harnessed in the future to help treat substance use disorders or mental illnesses,” she said.

Recent NIH-Supported Study on Psilocybin

Bertagnolli specifically referenced a study published last month in the journal *Nature*, supported by the NIH, that used MRI brain mapping to observe the effects of psilocybin on healthy adults. The research, conducted by scientists at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, involved administering doses of psilocybin and methylphenidate (the generic form of Ritalin) to participants in a medically supervised setting. Six to twelve months later, participants returned for a follow-up session where they were given psilocybin alone.

Profound Brain Changes Observed

The study revealed profound and widespread changes to the brain’s functional networks following the administration of psilocybin. “Comparisons of the brain images revealed profound and widespread, but temporary, changes to the brain’s functional networks,” Bertagnolli wrote in a blog post. Notably, the brain’s default mode network—a set of interconnected brain areas most active during daydreaming or when not engaged in goal-directed activities—became desynchronized after participants took psilocybin. These effects were not observed after taking methylphenidate. Although brain function nearly returned to its original state after the effects of psilocybin wore off, researchers noted subtle, longer-term changes that could suggest increased brain flexibility in the weeks following the dose.

Implications for Mental Health Treatment

The NIH Director noted that these findings might help explain why preliminary research shows psilocybin could benefit patients with substance use disorders, depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions. However, she cautioned against interpreting these encouraging results as a reason to self-medicate with psilocybin. “The drug is not proven or approved as a treatment for any condition, and its unsupervised use comes with serious risks,” Bertagnolli warned. She underscored the importance of further clinical studies to understand how and why psilocybin affects individuals as powerfully as it does, which could potentially lead to new mental health treatments.

NIDA and FDA on Psychedelics

Bertagnolli’s statements align with those of National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Director Nora Volkow, who has also spoken about the significant potential of psychedelics as therapeutic treatments for certain mental health conditions. Meanwhile, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is facing criticism for its decision earlier this year not to approve MDMA-assisted therapy for conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), despite recommendations from an agency advisory committee.

Veterans and Psychedelic Research

Amid growing interest in psychedelic therapies, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has reported “stunning and robust results” from its first-ever clinical trial on MDMA therapy. Senator Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ) has been praised for her advocacy on this issue, particularly following her visit to a VA research facility where she demonstrated deep knowledge of the psychedelic literature.

Legislative Developments on Psychedelics and Cannabis

The conversation around psychedelics is also influencing legislative developments. Recently, the U.S. House of Representatives approved amendments to a major spending bill that would allow VA doctors to recommend medical marijuana to veterans and support research into psychedelics. Additionally, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed report language expressing concerns about the restrictions on marijuana and psychedelics research imposed by current laws.

Future of Psychedelic Research and Therapy

As public and scientific interest in psychedelics continues to grow, the NIH and other federal agencies are playing a critical role in supporting research that could reshape mental health treatment. With continued study, psilocybin and other psychedelics might one day provide effective interventions for patients struggling with mental health disorders that have proven resistant to traditional therapies. However, experts like Bertagnolli stress the need for rigorous clinical trials and caution against unsupervised use of these powerful substances.

Email: info@cannabisriskmanager.com | Phone: +415-226-4060

© Copyright 2025 Cannabis Risk Manager. All Rights Reserved