

# Key to Colorado's Psychedelics Program Success: Education

## Education Seen as Key to Success of Colorado's New Psychedelics Program

As Colorado gears up to issue licenses for its newly established psychedelic mushroom program, healthcare professionals who have closely followed the rulemaking process emphasize that education will be crucial to the program's success. With the state set to launch a regulated market for psilocybin therapy, stakeholders are focused on ensuring that both the public and professionals are well-informed about the new regulations and the safe use of these substances.

### A Different Approach from Cannabis

Colorado's voter-approved natural medicine program will allow licensed facilitators to conduct therapeutic sessions using psilocybin, the active ingredient in psychedelic mushrooms. Unlike the state's cannabis industry, however, the psilocybin program will operate under a distinct model. Consumers won't be able to purchase psilocybin products for home use. Instead, individuals interested in psychedelic therapy will undergo a screening process to assess risks and suitability. If deemed appropriate candidates, they will participate in guided sessions within a secure, regulated environment, overseen by licensed facilitators.

### Regulatory Framework and Implementation

The regulation of this program is divided between two Colorado agencies. The Colorado Department of Revenue (DOR) is responsible for regulating natural medicine businesses, including healing centers, cultivation sites, manufacturers, and testing facilities, and will handle licensing for owners and employees. The Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA) oversees the training and licensing of facilitators who will work directly with those consuming natural medicine.

DORA has already approved several training programs for facilitators, including those at Naropa University in Boulder, the Changa Institute in Oregon, and the Integrative Psychiatry Institute in Niwot. Aspiring facilitators must complete these programs and meet all requirements before applying for a license.

### Health Professionals Advocate for Safety and Education

Healthcare professionals see the inclusion of psilocybin as a new tool in the mental health toolkit, potentially aiding in the treatment of conditions like PTSD, obsessive-compulsive disorder, substance use disorder, and major depression. Taisa Poinatte, executive director of the Healing Advocacy Fund, a nonprofit organization promoting safe and equitable access to psychedelic therapies, believes the program offers significant potential for mental health treatment in Colorado.

"This is a modality that can positively impact our options for mental health, and we're just scratching the surface of what's possible," Poinatte said. She noted that Colorado's program differs from Oregon's by

allowing healthcare providers to integrate natural medicine into their existing practices, offering greater flexibility.

### **Addressing the Mental Health Crisis**

In rural Colorado, where mental health providers are scarce, the program could be particularly impactful. Erica Messinger, a nurse from Dolores, highlighted the challenges faced by individuals with chronic medical conditions who struggle to implement effective health changes. She shared the story of a patient who experienced profound benefits from a therapeutic DMT session, saying it was more effective than a decade of traditional therapy.

Messinger has been actively involved in supporting the state's regulatory process, contributing her expertise to the Natural Medicine Advisory Board's ethics and safety subcommittee. She stressed the importance of ensuring that the program is as safe as possible to address Colorado's mental health crisis.

### **Shifting Public Perception**

Education will be key in shifting public perception and understanding of psychedelics. Messinger emphasized the need for first responders and healthcare providers to be educated on the medical uses of psychedelics to avoid misunderstandings that could undermine public opinion.

Poinsatte added that public attitudes in Colorado could evolve similarly to those in Oregon, where local officials became more supportive of psychedelic therapies after hearing directly from constituents about their positive experiences.

### **Pharmacists and Therapists Weigh In**

Pharmacists like Kristin Speer, who has experience managing end-of-life symptoms with ketamine, see psilocybin as another valuable tool in patient care. She praised Colorado's efforts to seek input from diverse sources, including healthcare professionals and Indigenous communities, to develop a well-rounded program.

Therapists like Michaela Vogt, who runs a private practice in Littleton, believe that psychedelic therapies can help bridge the gap between cognitive therapy and physical well-being. Vogt, who contributed to the program's development, emphasized that education will be crucial in changing the narrative around psychedelics and ensuring that mental health providers can accurately explain the benefits to patients.

### **Ensuring Safety and Responsible Use**

Child safety is also a priority in the program's design. Poinsatte reassured that the regulated model, which limits access to adults over 21 under strict supervision, includes safeguards to prevent psilocybin from reaching unintended users. Both state agencies will begin accepting licensing applications by December 31, with businesses expected to open next year. As the program evolves, regulations will continue to be refined based on new insights and emerging questions.

With the groundwork laid, Colorado's success in implementing its psychedelic mushroom program will depend heavily on how well the state educates both professionals and the public about the safe and responsible use of these powerful substances.

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