

Congress to Decide Fate of Psychedelics Bill for Veterans Despite VA Resistance

Introduction

A congressional committee is poised to vote on a GOP-led bill this week that would require the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to inform Congress of any additions of psychedelics to its formulary of covered prescription drugs. As legislators prepare for the upcoming markup, the bill has stirred debate over its necessity and implications for veterans' health care.

Legislative Action

Rep. Derrick Van Orden (R-WI) introduced the bill, which will undergo markup by the House Veterans' Affairs Health Subcommittee on Tuesday. The legislation follows an initial hearing held by the subcommittee about a month ago, where discussions centered on proposals from Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA) as well. However, Miller-Meeks' measure, despite VA support with certain amendments, is not on the markup agenda.

VA Opposition and Bill Details

The VA has expressed opposition to the psychedelics bill, deeming it "unnecessary." Nevertheless, the proposed legislation mandates that VA report to Congress within 180 days of federal FDA approval of any psychedelic medicines added to its formulary. The report must include the Secretary's determination and justification for the inclusion of such drugs.

Potential Federal Approval of Psychedelic Medicines

Currently, no psychedelic drugs are federally approved for prescription use. However, recent developments suggest potential changes on the horizon. The FDA has agreed to expedite the review of MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD, and breakthrough therapy designations have been granted for psilocybin and an LSD-like compound. Additionally, VA issued a request for applications to study psychedelics' potential in treating PTSD and depression.

Legislative Support and Funding

Rep. Van Orden, the bill's sponsor, is also a co-sponsor of bipartisan legislation to fund DOD clinical trials on psychedelics' therapeutic potential for active-duty military members. Last year, congressional appropriations leaders allocated \$10 million for psychedelics studies. Rep. Miller-Meeks has emphasized the importance of supporting research into psychedelic and cannabis therapies for conditions like PTSD.

Continued Advocacy and Research

Veterans service organizations (VSOs) have urged Congress to prioritize research into psychedelic-assisted therapy and medical marijuana, citing potential benefits for veterans' health care. VA's initiatives, including a podcast on the healing potential of psychedelics and participation in research discussions, reflect ongoing efforts to explore alternative treatments.

Conclusion

As Congress weighs the GOP-led psychedelics bill, the debate underscores broader discussions about veterans' access to innovative therapies. While questions remain about the bill's necessity and implications, ongoing advocacy and research efforts signal growing recognition of the potential benefits of psychedelic-assisted therapy for veterans' mental health care needs.

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