

# Psilocybin Use Rising, But Research Faces Legal Barriers

Psilocybin Use Surges Across the U.S. as Researchers Warn Federal Law Blocks Critical Study

A new scientific review published by the American Medical Association (AMA) reveals that psilocybin use has sharply increased across the United States, driven by the wave of local decriminalization measures and a growing body of promising clinical research highlighting its therapeutic potential.

However, the review published in *JAMA Psychiatry* on Wednesday warns that outdated federal drug laws remain a major barrier to scientific understanding of the psychedelic compound's full effects, creating a gap between public access and research-backed safety oversight.

## **Public enthusiasm for psilocybin is outpacing scientific understanding**

Researchers from the University of Colorado analyzed epidemiological and pharmacological studies covering psilocybin-related trends between January and December 2024. They found that usage rates of psychedelic mushrooms, particularly among adults aged 19 to 50, have surged in tandem with decriminalization campaigns and expanding public acceptance.

The paper compares the trend to early cannabis legalization, concluding that “public access and enthusiasm are outpacing regulatory oversight and scientific understanding,” which may pose new public health risks if left unaddressed.

## **Rising use linked to poison control calls and potency inconsistencies**

The review highlights a significant increase in poison control center calls related to psychedelics. Data from cities that have decriminalized psilocybin shows “more than 20-fold variability in mushroom potency” and inconsistent levels of other tryptamines across strains.

They emphasized that existing clinical data are insufficient to guide harm reduction or inform effective policy, urging a pivot toward real-world studies on psilocybin consumption patterns, potency testing, and age-specific risk factors.

## **Federal barriers hinder real world psilocybin research**

The study calls on the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and academic institutions to prioritize psilocybin research, but notes that Schedule I classification under the Controlled Substances Act makes studying naturally occurring mushrooms difficult.

While synthetic psilocybin has been tested in clinical settings, little is known about the natural form commonly consumed by the public. The authors argue that this legal disconnect prevents scientists from understanding psilocybin's actual public health impact.

A recent development the Scottsdale Research Institute's federal approval to produce natural psilocybin for research may help fill that gap. Yet, according to the AMA study, "very little is known about the acute or long-term effects of naturally occurring psilocybin," and rescheduling remains essential to advance public safety.

## **Lessons from cannabis: science lags behind legalization**

Drawing parallels to cannabis reform, the authors warned that psilocybin policy could follow a similar path where consumption grows faster than scientific evidence.

The review stops short of calling for stricter enforcement, instead advocating for research-driven regulation and harm reduction strategies to manage the growing psychedelic marketplace.

## **A national shift in attitudes toward psychedelics**

The release of the AMA study coincides with renewed federal interest in psychedelic research. In August, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) formally requested a scientific review of psilocybin, a potential first step toward rescheduling.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has also taken a more open stance, with Secretary Doug Collins expressing support for studying psilocybin as a treatment for veterans with PTSD. Meanwhile, Reps. Jack Bergman (R-MI) and Lou Correa (D-CA) have introduced legislation to fund "centers for excellence" within VA hospitals dedicated to psychedelic therapies.

Even some Trump administration officials, including surgeon general nominee Casey Means, have spoken publicly about personal benefits from psilocybin use further reflecting the mainstreaming of psychedelic medicine in U.S. discourse.

## **Researchers call for "smart regulation," not prohibition**

Ultimately, the AMA review concludes that criminalization is not the answer. Instead, it urges the federal government to establish a regulatory framework that ensures safety, quality, and education while supporting ongoing scientific study.

As psilocybin use continues to rise and more Americans turn to psychedelics for mental health and wellness, the review underscores an urgent need for balanced regulation and federally supported research that matches public interest.

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