

# **Grant Denied for Psychedelic Veterans Suicide Prevention Program**

## **VA Faces Criticism After Rejecting Grant Application From Psychedelic Focused Veterans Group Aiming to Reduce Suicide**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is under scrutiny after denying a grant application from No Fallen Heroes, an organization dedicated to connecting veterans with programs abroad offering psychedelic-assisted therapy to address severe mental health conditions. The rejection has sparked concern among veterans' advocates and advocates for alternative treatments, particularly as VA Secretary Doug Collins has publicly expressed support for expanding access to psychedelics like ibogaine to help curb veteran suicide rates.

Matthew "Whiz" Buckle, a Navy "TOPGUN" veteran and founder of No Fallen Heroes, said the group has spent the past five years providing trauma-informed support and "sacred-medicine healing retreats," which have positively impacted over 100 veterans and first responders. "We've saved and changed the lives of over 100 veterans and first responders through real, trauma-informed support and sacred-medicine healing retreats," Buckle said.

Despite the organization's targeted mission to mitigate veteran suicides, Buckle shared that the group received a rejection letter from the VA for the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant, following an "exhaustive, in-depth application that our team poured their heart into."

## **Veterans Group Criticizes Bureaucracy While VA Maintains Rejection Was Due to Eligibility Thresholds**

Buckle suggested that the rejection may stem from the organization's use of psychedelic-assisted therapy. "We can assume why. We use psychedelic-assisted (sacrament-assisted) healing—the very thing saving the lives the VA keeps losing," he said. "But that's the point: What we're doing as a country clearly isn't working. It is time to do something new."

The rejection comes months after Buckle personally met with VA staff, including Secretary Collins, to discuss the therapeutic potential of psychedelic medicine for veterans. Collins reportedly raised the topic with President Donald Trump during a cabinet meeting in May. Buckle expressed frustration with the agency, saying, "Clearly, the VA bureaucracy is not listening to its own leadership. Shocking, I know."

In the rejection letter, Todd Burnett, acting director of the VA Office of Suicide Prevention, stated that the application "did not meet one or more of the requirements in 38 C.F.R. § 78.20 for threshold review, and it is therefore not eligible to be considered for funding." The letter did not provide further details regarding the substance of the proposal.

Marijuana Moment reached out to the VA for comment on the denial but had not received a response by the time of publication.

## **VA Secretary Doug Collins Advocates for Psychedelics While Bureaucracy Limits Grant Opportunities**

Secretary Collins has emerged as a vocal supporter of expanding psychedelics access for veterans with serious mental health conditions. According to former U.S. Senator Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ), Collins has expressed openness to reform and the therapeutic potential of psychedelics like ibogaine. While the secretary was reportedly unfamiliar with psychedelic therapy prior to joining the Trump administration, he has since become a leading advocate within the cabinet.

In July, Collins highlighted his efforts to promote psychedelics access, stating that he had “opened that door probably wider than most ever thought was possible” and emphasizing the importance of alternatives for treating serious mental health conditions. “I’m the first VA secretary—actually, in a Cabinet meeting about a month and a half ago to actually bring up psychedelics in a Cabinet meeting,” he said. “We’ve got to put alternatives on the map. The VA is going to do our job. We’re going to do within the law and do what we have to do.”

Collins noted that the VA is conducting approximately a dozen clinical trials exploring various substances, including MDMA-assisted therapy at the VA Bronx Health Care system, which has reportedly produced promising results. The secretary has also emphasized the goal of curing, rather than merely treating, mental health conditions among veterans.

## **Veterans Advocates Call for Expanded Access to Alternative Treatments as Suicide Rates Remain a Crisis**

Critics argue that denying grants to organizations like No Fallen Heroes undermines innovative approaches to veteran suicide prevention. Buckle said, “If the VA and Secretary Collins believe there are organizations doing more to prevent veteran suicide than we are, I’d genuinely love to meet them. We’re not here to wait. We’re not here to ask permission. Lead. Follow. Or get out of the way. Our heroes don’t have time for bureaucracy.”

The ongoing tension between VA bureaucratic processes and advocates for psychedelic-assisted therapy reflects broader debates within the federal government over alternative treatments for mental health. As the conversation around psychedelics and veterans’ health grows, the rejection of grant applications for innovative programs highlights the challenges of navigating traditional federal funding pathways while attempting to implement non-traditional, evidence-based therapies.

While the VA continues internal and partnered research into psychedelic therapies, the denial of external nonprofit grant requests raises questions about how quickly new therapeutic modalities will become accessible to veterans in need. Advocates hope that increased awareness and continued advocacy from figures like Secretary Collins could expand options for veterans and reduce the persistent suicide rates within the community.

## **Balancing Bureaucracy With Innovative Solutions to Veteran Suicide**

As Secretary Collins continues to champion the potential of psychedelics, organizations like No Fallen Heroes emphasize that bureaucratic barriers remain a significant hurdle to implementing effective, alternative mental health treatments. The grant denial underscores the tension between innovative therapeutic approaches and the federal system's rigid eligibility requirements, even amid high-level support for reform.

For veterans facing mental health crises, advocates argue that time is critical. Buckle summarized the stakes plainly: "Our heroes don't have time for bureaucracy. It is time to do something new." The ongoing dialogue between the VA, nonprofit organizations, and federal leadership will determine whether psychedelic-assisted therapy becomes a viable and accessible tool in the nation's fight against veteran suicide.

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