

Veterans Affairs Official Highlights Growing Bipartisan Support for Psychedelics in Congress

A top official with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is heralding the growing bipartisan support for psychedelic medicine in Congress, noting its surpassing acceptance compared to marijuana. At a recent psychedelics conference organized by Horizons, VA Under Secretary for Health Shereef Elnahal highlighted the momentum behind advancing psychedelic therapies, particularly in the veteran community.

Push for Psychedelic Medicine

Elnahal emphasized an “unstoppable narrative” in favor of psychedelic medicine, fueled by both compelling personal narratives of recovery and robust clinical data. He outlined VA’s proactive stance in positioning the department to offer psychedelics-assisted therapy as soon as it receives FDA approval. Anticipating significant demand from veterans, Elnahal stressed the need to further prove the therapeutic case for psychedelics, including psilocybin and MDMA.

Ethical Considerations and FDA Review

Acknowledging calls for more immediate access to psychedelic treatments, Elnahal underscored the ethical imperative of addressing the potential benefits for veterans. While unable to predict the timing of the FDA’s ongoing review of MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD, he stressed the necessity for VA readiness in the event of approval.

Bipartisan Backing in Congress

One surprising revelation for Elnahal was the bipartisan support for psychedelic medicine in Congress, citing the leadership of conservative members like Rep. Morgan Luttrell (R-TX). He noted a proactive stance from lawmakers in facilitating research and enabling VA to explore psychedelic therapies, highlighting a smoother regulatory pathway compared to cannabis studies.

Legislative Developments

Recent legislative actions underscore Congress’s growing interest in psychedelics. The House Veterans’ Affairs Committee passed a bill mandating VA notification to Congress on the addition of psychedelics to its formulary. Additionally, President Biden signed into law funding for DOD clinical trials on psychedelics under the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Congressional appropriations also allocated \$10 million for psychedelics studies.

Advocacy and Research

Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) have urged Congress to prioritize psychedelic-assisted therapy and medical marijuana. Their calls for action echo frustrations over perceived delays in VA research initiatives. VA’s recent podcast series and collaborations with FDA highlight the evolving landscape of veteran healthcare and research into innovative treatments.

As momentum builds in Congress and within VA, stakeholders continue to advocate for expanded access to psychedelic therapies, recognizing their potential to address mental health challenges facing veterans.

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