



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on June 30, 2021

California Moves to Legalize Psychedelic Drugs

On Tuesday, California moved another step closer to decriminalizing psychedelic drugs amid a debate over whether their prohibition is an outdated remnant of the “War on Drugs.”

The bill cleared the Assembly Public Safety Committee 5-3, with proponents touting the benefits to military veterans and others they say can benefit from the use of psychedelics to treat trauma. The measure already passed the state Senate on a 21-16 vote and now heads to the health committee before it can go to the full Assembly, NBC Bay Area [reports](#).



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If passed, [Senate Bill 519](#) would allow those 21 and older to possess for personal use and non-commercial “social sharing” of psilocybin, the hallucinogenic component of so-called magic mushrooms. It also covers psilocin, dimethyltryptamine (DMT), ibogaine, mescaline, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA, often called ecstasy). In total, there are 23 hallucinogenic substances on the bill.

The bill also includes language to end promotion of abstinence in state drug and alcohol programs.

After successfully navigating through three committees, the bill’s author, Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco), is optimistic about the legislature’s chances.

Wiener states he is pushing the measure as a way to expand treatment for mental illnesses and roll back criminal-justice policies that he sees as discriminating against people of color.

During his interview with ABC10, Wiener [said](#) the psychedelic drugs are showing “huge potential” in terms of treating mental-health and addiction problems, but these drugs are illegal right now in California because of the “War on Drugs.”

The senator argues that this “war” has been a complete failure. He stressed that the issue of drugs is a health issue, not a criminal one. “It’s time to take a health-based approach to drugs instead of just mass incarcerating people, which just wastes money and does not stop people from using drugs,” Wiener states. “And so let’s stop arresting people for possessing and using these drugs, in this case psychedelics, and then we can talk about other drugs,” Wiener added.

When arguing about the potential therapeutic use of psychedelic and hallucinogenic drugs, Wiener cited studies by Johns Hopkins University, the University of California, San Francisco, and UCLA that found psychedelic therapies can help where other treatments have failed. Among other things, the senator said research has shown the use of MDMA can help reduce the severity of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The bill is co-sponsored by two veterans’ groups, Heroic Hearts Project and Veterans Exploring Treatment Solutions, which work to provide veterans with effective mental-health treatments.



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However, the drugs' implications on one's health, potential of underage use, and threats of overdose have raised serious concerns among other lawmakers.

Republican Assemblyman Kelly Seyarto [said](#) he favors anything that helps veterans, but "it has to be done in a clinical setting, it has to be done under the watchful eye of a physician" to make sure there are no ill effects. Under Wiener's bill, he said, "this will be just like beer, you just go get the 21-year-old to give you the stuff."

California Narcotics Officers Association legislative director John Lovell [stated](#) that even though his organization doesn't "seek" to put people in jail for drug use, the bill's allowance of social sharing could lead to more overdoses and fatalities from contaminated drugs, and LSD should be excluded because "it is married to flashbacks" and can result in "a trip people can have for the rest of their lives."

[According](#) to the American Addiction Center, LSD causes changes in the brain's blood flow and electrical activity, and affects serotonin receptors in the brain. As a result, individuals may have trouble with motor function, suffer from poor judgment and impulse control, engage in behaviors that are out of character, and be a danger to themselves or others.

Like other hallucinogenic drugs, such as LSD, DMT, or "magic mushrooms," is [thought](#) to produce most of its effects by acting on neural highways in the brain that use the neurotransmitter serotonin. More specifically, DMT affects the brain's prefrontal cortex, part of the brain that regulates abstract thinking, thought analysis, and plays a key role in mood and perception.

Similarly, MDMA, or ecstasy, [mainly affects](#) brain cells that use the chemical serotonin to communicate with each other. Clinical studies suggest that MDMA may increase the risk of long-term, perhaps permanent, problems with memory and learning. The use [may lead](#) to long-term neurochemical and brain cell damage. It is also used as a date-rape drug.

Mixing any of those drugs together or taking them with alcohol can amplify the side effects of substances and increase the likelihood of an overdose.

So much for helping the vets!

Even if California makes the bill law, the drugs would still be illegal under federal law.

Hallucinogenic drugs have been approved for use in other states. [Oregon](#) voters last year approved decriminalizing small amounts of psychedelics among other drugs, and separately were the first to approve the supervised use of psilocybin in a therapeutic setting.

Oakland and Santa Cruz, [California](#); Washington, D.C.; Ann Arbor, [Michigan](#); Somerville and Cambridge, [Massachusetts](#), have decriminalized certain natural psychedelics that come from plants and fungi. [Denver](#) was the first U.S. city to decriminalize hallucinogenic mushrooms for personal use two years ago.



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