



September 1, 2019

RE: Motion B.11. The Vancouver Police Department's response to the unlawful sales of psilocybin mushrooms.

Dear Kennedy Stewart and City Counsellors,

As the City of Vancouver considers its response to the open sales of psilocybin mushrooms, the city staff may want to consider the larger research and international context within which this discussion is occurring. The intention of this letter is to offer a summary of the psilocybin scientific research, observations of the international context and a recommendation for an evidence based response to psilocybin sales.

A recent Canadian Medical Journal explored the international resurgence of interest in the potential health and other benefits of psychedelics [1]. Psilocybin specifically has been the focus of many research initiatives which have explored a wide range of potential benefits of psilocybin. In a pooled analysis of many experimental studies, Studerus [2] states that psilocybin induced profound changes in mood, perception, thought and self-experience. Most subjects described the experience as pleasurable, enriching and non-threatening.

Carhart-Harris observed that 58% of subjects with treatment-resistant depression who were treated with psilocybin met the criteria for remission after 3 months [3], and this successful outcome was maintained at 6 months [4]. This success may be partially due to subjects' increased experience of connectedness to self, others and the world [5]. Bogenschutz [6] observed that psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy for alcohol dependence was associated with a reduction in cravings and increased periods of abstinence. A pilot study of psilocybin-assisted treatment for tobacco dependency showed abstinence rates that were more than double the rates of typical tobacco cessation programs [7] and this positive treatment outcome persisted at long-term follow-up [8].

Grob et al. [9] found that psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy was associated with reductions of anxiety and improvement in mood among individuals with advanced cancer corroborating similar findings from research several decades ago, which also reported a decrease in the fear of death in some subjects [10, 11]. Moreno et al [12] observed psilocybin use to be associated with acute reductions in core obsessive compulsive symptoms. Sewell et al. [13] found that a group of patients suffering from cluster migraine headaches reported having symptoms either terminated or attenuated by psilocybin. MacLean et al. [14] observed that psychedelic use could affect domains of personality which are usually understood to be stable and fixed in adulthood. Specifically, they found

that the trait of openness was significantly increased by a clinically supervised experience with psilocybin.

Non-clinical uses of psychedelics have been observed to be associated with significantly reduced psychological distress and suicidality [15], reduced recidivism for offenders under community corrections supervision [16] and reduced arrests for intimate partner violence [17].

The above findings may be partially explained by a number of studies which explored the psychopharmacological effects of psychedelics in healthy human subjects. Griffiths [18] documented the effects of a single dose of psilocybin in healthy volunteers taken in a supervised, supportive session. He found that this experience had a profound impact on personal meaning and spirituality, which had a positive impact on attitude and behaviour. A 14 month follow-up found this effect to be persistent [19]. Nicolas observed that mystical experiences with psilocybin can be gained at varying dosage levels [20]. Another factor which could potentially explain the positive effects of psilocybin is the increased brain connections of people on psilocybin which can be observed with fMRI technology [21].

While the recent clinical psychedelic research findings should be regarded as preliminary due to the small sample sizes, it should be noted that no serious or enduring adverse effects have been observed [22]. Further, a number of authors have offered a risk / benefit analysis of psychedelics and suggested that these substances be reclassified to reduce access restrictions [23-26].

Johnson [27] examined the abuse potential of psilocybin using the 8 factors of the Controlled Substances Act and observed that there is no evidence for physical dependence or withdrawal and that doses which may lead to a fatal overdose are 1000 times more than the highest clinical dose. This is consistent with Nutt's analysis of drug harms which included both "harms to self" and "harms to others" and ranked psilocybin mushrooms as the least harmful of the substances examined [28].

The City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Police Department have often led the way in progressive policing practices. A VPD report justifying the lack of police attention to cannabis dispensaries stated "Chief Constable Palmer (and before him Chief Constable Chu) have been open and transparent in stating the VPD's position that marijuana dispensaries are not a high priority for drug enforcement in the absence of overt public safety concerns" [29]. This report reflects the belief that expensive police resources should be focused on behaviours which are associated with individual or societal harms, which is rarely the case with psilocybin containing mushrooms. Utilizing police resources dealing with this issue precludes more appropriate deployment.

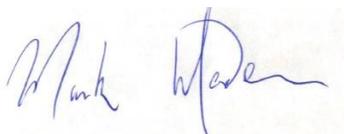
The decision to adopt a lenient enforcement approach to the sale of psilocybin mushrooms is consistent with a public health approach to currently illegal drugs [30-32]. The observation that enforcement of drug crimes is both ineffective and the cause of many health and social problems has been made by many academics, health service providers, researchers and other thought leaders [33-39] which all influence public opinion. Defacto

decriminalization of psilocybin mushrooms is consistent with the above referenced police report which observes “the VPD must consider evolving community standards” [29] which continue to change now that cannabis has been legalized without any significant health or social harms.

It is interesting to observe that the Federal Government’s proactive leadership in responding to the individual, social and economic harms of drug prohibition has been conspicuously absent. Cannabis was only legalized after a number of opinion polls indicated that a majority of Canadians supported this initiative. Drug policy reform has largely been in response to public opinion which has grown progressively supportive as “sales activists” have been increasingly public in their offerings. Now that cannabis is legal in Canada, shifting the attention to psychedelics is a reasonable next step for those who aspire to evidence-based drug laws. Psilocybin, which is increasingly recognized as having significant potential benefits and low risk for harm, is the psychedelic of choice for many drug policy reformers. This is consistent with a number of US psychedelic plant and fungus decriminalization and legalization initiatives. Denver [40] and Oakland [41] have decriminalized “magic mushrooms” and full legalization is being pursued in the state of Oregon [42]. A group of physicians and therapists in Victoria, B.C. have filed an application with Health Canada seeking permission to use psilocybin in the clinical treatment of “end-of-life distress”[43]. Finally, decriminalization of psilocybin-containing fungus material (truffles) has occurred in the Netherlands since 2008 and this is not perceived as problematic by the residents of Amsterdam where they are sold openly.

In conclusion, the staff and board at MAPS Canada observe that psilocybin mushrooms have a low risk for social or individual harm and significant potential for benefit. Also, there is increasing public support for drug decriminalization and legalization initiatives. Therefore, we encourage the City of Vancouver to not expend valuable police and court resources and to place enforcement against the sales of psilocybin mushrooms as the lowest possible police priority.

Sincerely,



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References

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