

# Psychedelics and Public Health

Health Equity Council

## Executive statement

Numerous different historical cultures have used hallucinogens (i.e., psychedelics) for spiritual, ceremonial and recreational purposes for thousands of years. Their criminalization was due to socio-political factors in the 1960s and not their pharmacological properties. Public health recognizes the positive health impacts of psychedelics use and the harmful consequences of continued prohibition and criminalization.

## Background

Psychedelic substances include psilocybin (a naturally occurring chemical compound and psychedelic product produced by more than 100 species of mushrooms worldwide), LSD, MDMA, DMT, ayahuasca, peyote, mescaline, and other psychoactive substances based on the tryptamine or phenethylamine classes of compounds. Researchers found that psychedelics are not known to harm the brain, cause addiction or compulsive use and serious adverse events involving psychedelics are extremely rare and usually dose/toxicity dependent.

Public health interventions that promote healthy behavior impact individual and community health and well-being, increase social cohesion and safety, and reduce individual and public health economic burdens.

Emerging research is strengthening the evidence that the compounds found in psychedelics can produce positive effects on health behaviors, health, well-being, and social behaviors. In the heightened sense of psychological flexibility induced by the chemical reactions upon use of psychedelics, the individual can shift perspectives on health behavior and lived experience.

Psychedelic substances can thus be a psychological catalyst in therapy to promote healthy behaviors in patients with depression, anxiety, substance misuse, and other conditions. Ongoing research shows that this can be extended to other practices for physical and psychological health.

## Recommendations

### Decriminalize Psychedelics

Criminalization of drugs disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous and communities of color. Criminalization limits harm reduction approaches, therapeutic and cultural consumption of substances. Decriminalization can pave the way for prioritizing education, reducing harm, promoting healthy behaviors, increasing public safety and other public health outcomes.

### Invest in education

Internal and external context at the time of consumption highly influence the psychedelics effects. There is a need for public education on consumption of psychedelics, quality assurance, and networks of experienced and competent “trip-sitters” (ceremonial leaders, therapists, guides, peer support, etc).

### Center equity

It will be essential to center BIPOC communities to ensure equitable access and not to create any disparities from selective decriminalization of substances.