

# Congress Is Pushing Revolutionary Research on Psychedelic Treatments for the Military

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By Prem Thakker, originally published by [The Intercept](#) with funding from A-Mark Foundation.<sup>[1]</sup>

Congress is on track to approve legislation that would mark a significant advance in U.S. policy toward psychedelics.

Tucked into the National Defense Authorization Act of 2024 is a provision to fund clinical trials using psychedelic substances to treat active duty members of the military.

Section 723 of the [NDAA](#) directs the secretary of defense to partner with a federal or state government agency, or an academic institution, to carry out the research. The bill would fund the treatment of members of the military with post-traumatic stress or a traumatic brain injury with a number of psychedelic substances, including MDMA, psilocybin, ibogaine, DMT, and other plant-based alternative therapies (such as ayahuasca).

Research surrounding psychedelics as a possible treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder have slowly grown, and recent studies have shown [promising results](#), with patients benefiting from even just a few treatments including MDMA and psilocybin. Already, the Food and Drug Administration has designated both treatments as "breakthrough therapies": a special designation given to expedite the research and development into drugs with the potential to treat serious conditions. On Tuesday, MAPS Public Benefit Corporation, which focuses on psychedelic treatments for mental health issues, submitted a new drug application to the FDA for MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD. The company [says](#) it's the first such submission for any psychedelic-assisted therapy.

In addition to the direct benefits of the treatment, the trials could show the Department of Defense, which considers PTSD a [disqualifying condition](#), that it's something people can heal from, said Jon Lubecky, a veteran who benefitted from an MDMA clinical trial to treat PTSD. "People who are in service who have [PTSD] won't say they have it — which leads to, look at the suicide rate in the military right now — because they will get kicked out," Lubecky said. "If they can return to duty — if one person returns to duty — that says everybody has the possibility to return to duty, which means more people will get help if they think they'll actually get help."

Lubecky, who has advocated for Pentagon-funded research, said he hopes its benefits will extend to workers in other stressful jobs, and society generally, citing police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians.

Dedicated Defense Department research trials could also shift policy in other government agencies, or at least exhibit an openness for further research, he added. "So the bureaucracy sees 'I'm not going to get fired for this,'" Lubecky said. "One of the biggest things that stalls government — I mean, as a veteran dealing with the VA — most of the problems that I have had fall into, 'It's easier to do nothing than to do something.'"

In the summer of 2022, the Department of Veterans Affairs launched a number of [clinical trials](#) involving psychedelic drugs. A month later, the Health and Human Services Department announced that the FDA may approve MDMA and psilocybin therapies sometime in 2024.

The psychedelics provision of the NDAA was authored by Rep. Morgan Luttrell, R-Texas. It is nearly identical to the [Douglas "Mike" Day Psychedelic Therapy to Save Lives Act](#), spearheaded by Rep. Dan Crenshaw, R-Texas, and backed by a number of other lawmakers earlier this year.

"I am thrilled to see my amendment to fund clinical research into emerging therapies to treat combat-related injuries included in NDAA," Luttrell told [The Intercept](#) in a statement. "This is a huge win that will give us the chance to save the lives of those who have bravely served our country, while moving away from problematic opioids. I'm confident support for these innovative solutions will continue to gain momentum."

Two related measures did not make it into the NDAA. One, a House-passed provision, would have created a medical cannabis pilot program for veterans, while a Senate-passed measure would have protected individuals who had used marijuana from denied security clearances.

The congressional effort on this issue began in earnest four years ago, when Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., introduced an amendment to expand research into psychedelics but was [shut down](#) by a majority of Democrats and nearly all Republicans. Ocasio-Cortez joined forces with Crenshaw last year to attach amendments to the annual military spending bill to increase access to psychedelic treatments to veterans and active service members, as well as to expand research into psychedelic substances.

"I've led this two years in a row in the House, and now finally got it into the final bill with the Senate. I'm thrilled," Crenshaw told The Intercept in a statement. "This will save lives and potentially revolutionize the way we treat all types of PTSD."

Colorado and Oregon have both [legalized](#) the use of psychedelics, namely psilocybin, in recent years. A few months ago, [California](#) lawmakers passed a bill to legalize psychedelics in their state, but Gov. Gavin Newsom [vetoed](#) it in October.

The NDAA is a must-pass piece of annual legislation. Once it makes it through Congress, it will go to President Joe Biden for his signature. Over the course of his political career, the president was a strong proponent of the war on drugs. In October 2002, for example, he took to the Senate floor to [back an effort to criminalize MDMA use at raves](#), just one day before voting in favor of sending troops to Iraq — a war that left an untold number of American soldiers with the ailments they may soon turn to psychedelics to treat.

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## References

1 Read the original article at <https://theintercept.com/2023/12/12/psychedelic-research-congress-ptsd-veterans/>

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