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Emerging Opportunities for Psychedelic Policy Reform

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The drug policy landscape has changed as quickly as any other issue in U.S. politics over the past few years. A growing majority of Americans—including many prominent lawmakers from both sides of the aisle—now support reforms like legally regulating marijuana, ending criminal penalties for drug possession, and reforming sentencing laws to scale back mass incarceration.

Our organization, the Drug Policy Alliance (DPA; drugpolicy.org), has played a pivotal role in most of the major drug policy reforms over the past two decades. Our mission, broadly defined, is to advance policies that reduce the harms of both drug use and drug prohibition, and to seek solutions that promote safety while upholding the sovereignty of individuals over their own minds and bodies.

One of the greatest harms of the war on drugs is that clinical research establishing the medical benefits of psychedelic drugs has been delayed for decades; but what about the ongoing use of psychedelics outside of medical or other clinical contexts? Support for broadly legalizing psychedelics such as MDMA and LSD is so low—less than 10%, about the same as for heroin or methamphetamine—as to make this politically unfeasible in the short- or medium-term. That's why the most important work we're doing right now is around changing the debate about how psychedelics are perceived and managed.

One key piece of this stems from a new project we've launched focused on nightlife and festival spaces. These settings have always been sites for drug use, from the ubiquitous alcohol to MDMA, psychedelics and a range of other substances. While periodic enforcement crackdowns have occurred in various scenes, rarely has there been any sustained reform-minded advocacy about drug use in these contexts. That's where Music Fan (drugpolicy.org/musicfan), our new project about nightlife and festivals, comes in.



The first goal of Music Fan is purely educational: to provide fact-based, easily shareable information to people about the drugs they may use in these settings. The second goal is to actually change the way drug use is managed in nightlife and festival spaces, by providing powerful tools for the expansion of drug education and other harm reduction practices like drug checking. To provide a comprehensive approach for key stakeholders, DPA recently produced a new publication, *Managing Drug Use at Your Event: An Event Producer's Guide to Health and Safety Best Practices*, in partnership with MAPS' Zendo Project, DanceSafe, and the medical and risk management group Mutual Aid Response Services (MARS).

Building on this foundation, the Music Fan project is stimulating debate about how drug policy affects safety at these events, while pushing back at zero tolerance and enforcement-heavy approaches in favor of health-centered practices. Where laws stand in the way—such as the federal Illicit Drug Anti-Proliferation (RAVE) Act—DPA is helping lead efforts at reform.

Our immediate policy goals are reforming the RAVE Act and protecting event producers from prosecution for integrating education, harm reduction, and drug checking at their events. We're also doing everything we can to widen the use of drug checking in the U.S., which may include creating protections for it by carving out exceptions from paraphernalia laws. At the same time, we're building a powerful base of support for reducing the role of drug war tactics at major festivals by demonstrating the prevalence of drug arrest and overzealous enforcement operations.

One of DPA's greatest priorities is ending the criminalization of drug use and possession, much in the same way that Portugal has since 2001 with great success. Ending arrests for possession of MDMA and psychedelics would spare tens of thousands of people every year from the harms of getting arrested, locked up behind bars, and burdened with a criminal record that greatly limits their life opportunities. DPA is in the early stages of a multi-year campaign to build support for decriminalization throughout the United States. A recent poll of Washington, D.C., voters found that a majority support this sort of reform.

We're also working closely with MAPS to expose and overcome the political obstacles that are still hindering scientific research. Last year, DPA and MAPS co-published an influential report, *The DEA: Four Decades of Obstructing Scientific Research* that revealed how marijuana and psychedelic research has been systematically blocked by the federal government.

For many years, we've also prioritized fomenting discussion and debates about psychedelics at DPA's biennial International Drug Policy Reform Conference (reformconference.org). This is the only place you'll find leading luminaries connecting the dots between psychedelics and other issues like criminal justice reform, marijuana legalization, and harm reduction. Past conference panels included, "What Do Psychedelics Have To Do With Drug Policy Reform?," "What Can Psychedelics

Teach Us About Harm Reduction?," "Are Psychedelics the 'New Pot?'," and "Ayahuasca, Religion, and Cultural Translation." This year's Reform Conference will be held November 18–21, 2015, in the Washington D.C. area—it's one of the best ways for MAPS supporters to meet other like-minded individuals and push reform opportunities forward.

DPA is a proud, long-time supporter of the work that MAPS is doing to demonstrate the safety and efficacy of psychedelics for science, therapy, spirituality, and personal

growth. We hope that MAPS' supporters will join us in our work to end the criminalization of psychedelics in national and international policy. ●

Jag Davies is the director of communications strategy at the Drug Policy Alliance, where he oversees the organization's publications, messaging and brand identity. Jag started his career at MAPS, where from 2003–2007 he served as director of communications and in other positions. He also previously worked for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), where he coordinated local, state, federal, and international efforts to end punitive drug policies that cause the widespread violation of constitutional and human rights. He currently lives in New York City. He can be reached at jdavies@drugpolicy.org.

Stefanie Jones is the nightlife community engagement manager at the Drug Policy Alliance. In this role she introduces harm reduction principles and drug policy alternatives to partygoers, public health officials and city nightlife regulators across the U.S. In her prior role within the organization as event manager she produced four progressively larger editions of the biennial International Drug Policy Reform Conference, as well as numerous local policy conferences, fundraisers and coalition-building meetings. She can be reached at sjones@drugpolicy.org.



Drug policy reformers at DPA's International Drug Policy Reform Conference.