



Jag Davies

Psychedelic Justice: How Do We Repair the Harms of Psychedelic Prohibition?

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**We are
the Drug
Policy
Alliance.**

PSYCHEDELICS CAN BE LIFE-CHANGING tools that can help people lead more meaningful and fulfilling lives. They can help us understand how changing ourselves—and the world around us—is possible.

When it comes to drugs and drug policies, the landscape has changed as quickly as any other issue in U.S. politics over the past few years. Despite the throwback drug war extremists now occupying the White House, the fact remains that a growing majority of Americans—including many prominent lawmakers from both sides of the aisle—now support making marijuana legal, significantly reducing the role of the criminalization in drug policy, and treating addiction as a health issue rather than a criminal one.

The Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) has played an instrumental role in many, if not most, of the major drug policy reforms over the past two decades—and we're increasingly turning our focus toward protecting the safety, wellness, and freedom of people who can benefit from psychedelics.

We believe people who use psychedelics shouldn't be vulnerable to criminal punishment—and we want to build a world where legal psychedelics make sense. This means:

1. *Exposing and overcoming ongoing barriers to scientific and medical research.* The potential benefits and risks of psychedelics need to be better understood, but the drug war and its ideology continue to drastically limit the scope of scientific research. That's why we're working to shift decision-making authority away from law enforcement, while empowering health and science experts. (For more on DPA's campaign to reform and eliminate the Drug Enforcement Administration [DEA], see drugpolicy.org/DEA.)

2. *Changing the conversation about how psychedelics are per-*

ceived and managed. Public support for legal access to psychedelics remains low due to unsubstantiated myths that are vestiges of the drug war. That's why we're working to educate the public about their histories, traditional uses, and clinical findings.

That's also why we're working with universities, festivals, nightlife venues, and other institutions to end zero tolerance policies—and to instead promote harm reduction and benefit maximization measures, such as drug checking and onsite peer counseling services like MAPS' Zendo Project. (Check out DPA's #SaferPartying campaign at drugpolicy.org/MusicFan for much more on this.)

3. *Repairing the harms of psychedelic prohibition and reducing the role of criminalization in psychedelic drug policy.* Psychedelic prohibition is a legacy of racism, colonialism, and the repression of indigenous cultures. This legacy continues today, with thousands of people every year getting handcuffed, arrested, branded for life as criminals, and serving time behind bars simply for using or possessing a psychedelic substance. These people are more likely to be young, non-white, and socioeconomically marginalized than most other people who use psychedelics.

While psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy could be approved within the next decade, that would not change the criminal penalties for people who use psychedelics outside of government-sanctioned, medically-supervised settings. That's why it's incumbent upon people who care about psychedelics to work toward ending the criminalization of people who use them outside of medical contexts, while also advocating for psychedelic-assisted therapy research.

We must ask ourselves: What would it mean if we end up in a world where psychedelics are legally accessible for a privileged few, while communities who have historically suffered

the worst harms of prohibition remain criminalized? For social change to be truly transformational, mustn't it lift up those who are the least privileged among us?

At DPA, we're working to end arrests and criminal penalties for people who use or possess psychedelics and other substances—a step several countries like Portugal and the Czech Republic have taken with enormous success—and to scale back draconian prison sentences for people convicted of making or selling them. We're also committed to exploring and evaluating small-scale models for legally regulating psychedelics outside of medical contexts, as well as protecting people who use psychedelics as part of a religious or spiritual practice.

From October 11–14, 2017, please join us in Atlanta for DPA's biennial International Drug Policy Reform Conference—it's one of the best ways for MAPS supporters to meet like-minded people and push reform opportunities forward. As in previous years, the Reform Conference will be co-hosted by MAPS and will foment discussion and debates about psychedelics through a series of forward-thinking panels with leading luminaries connecting the dots between psychedelics and other issues like criminal justice reform, marijuana legalization, drug treatment, and harm reduction.

Then on October 27, 2017, join us in Seattle, where DPA and the End of Life Liberty Project are co-organizing a day-long symposium on psychedelics and palliative care, hosted by the University of Washington's Schools of Law, Medicine, and Public Health.

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For those attending Psychedelic Science 2017, you can connect with me and my colleagues at DPA's community forum (Friday, April 21 at 4:30 PM). In addition, DPA's founder Ethan Nadelmann will speak on the "Psychedelics and Policy" panel, Audience Development Director Stefanie Jones will

speaking on the harm reduction panel, and Deputy Director of National Affairs Michael Collins will speak about marijuana research and policy reform.

DPA is a proud, long-time supporter of MAPS' work to demonstrate the safety and efficacy of psychedelics for science, therapy, spirituality, and personal growth. We are profoundly

grateful to MAPS for supporting our complementary work to reduce the role of criminalization in psychedelic drug policy and to diminish the pain that psychedelic prohibition continues to reap with every passing day.

Together, we can live to see a world where people who use psychedelics are no longer criminalized and stigmatized, where we are all free to share our full truths. 🌱

Jag Davies is the director of communications strategy at the Drug Policy Alliance (drugpolicy.org), the nation's leading organization promoting drug policies grounded in science, compassion, health and human rights. Jag worked at MAPS from 2003–2007, serving as director of communications and in other roles. 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 and can be reached at jdavies@drugpolicy.org.