

# From the Desk of Rick Doblin, Ph.D.

**The theme of this special** edition *MAPS Bulletin*, **Drug Reform and Drug Access Pathways**, encapsulates two foundational and parallel strategies of achieving my long-term goal: mass mental health and global spirituality.

The first strategy is FDA-regulated drug development potentially leading to prescription access to psychedelic-assisted therapies, starting with MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD, with globalization of research and regulatory approvals supplemented by insurance coverage from private and national health insurance, followed by expansion to medical uses of other psychedelics and cannabis. MAPS works to facilitate the entire psychedelic-assisted therapy ecosystem rather than just prioritizing our own research, leading to our policy of transparency and practice of collaboration rather than competition.

The second strategy is drug policy reform leading to a post-prohibition world of legal access for adults outside of medical and religious contexts accompanied with honest drug education, harm reduction services, treatment on demand for dependence or other challenging experiences, and access to unadulterated substances at low, generic prices. There would be prohibitions against use by minors but with overrides by parents and guardians to return the education and training of their children about psychedelics and cannabis to the family, as opposed to having government agencies dictate that families should educate their children in a failed abstinence-only model that has counter-productive outcomes, as in the case of alcohol.

As the last several decades of the reform of cannabis policies have taught us, medicalization precedes legalization. Regulated research into medical applications generates scientifically validated data about contexts and clinical applications in which benefits may outweigh risks. Due to the media interest in new scientific studies, and public interest in new treatments for problematic, painful, and sometimes fatal mental health conditions, scientific drug development research with psychedelics and cannabis generates a large amount of free, earned media. This earned media provides substantial public education that helps to counteract decades of propaganda from the War on Drugs that exaggerates risks and denies any benefits, in part through the suppression of research to prevent evidence of treatments for specific clinical indications where there is a favorable risk-to-benefit ratio.

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Some for-profit psychedelic companies fear that drug policy reform with legal access at generic prices will be bad for their business model of selling psychedelics and cannabis at pharmaceutical prices, after spending hundreds of millions of dollars on research, patient access, and commercialization. My view is that legal access will actually be helpful for the pharmaceutical model as psychedelics are further destigmatized, the general public becomes more familiar with non-ordinary states of consciousness, and the occupation of psychedelic therapist becomes professionalized. It seems likely that all these developments will result in an increase in the number of people interested in seeking out treatment for clinical conditions at psychedelic treatment centers (with insurance coverage) where therapists are cross-trained in all the available psychedelic treatments and able to design a personalized sequence of experiences for each patient.

It is possible that my view is incorrect, and that legalization will indeed reduce income for the psychedelic and cannabis pharmaceutical business models. If that turns out to be the case, then it is an outcome that needs to be accepted—eliminating the disastrous outcomes of the Drug War, and establishing the fundamental human right to explore one’s own consciousness, must be prioritized over generating pharmaceutical profits.

This issue contains fascinating articles about a range of topics related to Drug Reform and Drug Access Pathways. The special themed editions of the *MAPS Bulletin* are designed to raise and address issues to enhance and inform discussions as we all think through the many implications of the mainstreaming of psychedelics and cannabis into both medicine and broader legal access. Discussions about Drug Reform and Drug Access Pathways are not just hypothetical deliberations about possible outcomes in the distant future. In the coming months, MAPS will gather the final data point in our second Phase 3 study of MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD, and Colorado will vote on an initiative to create legal access to plant medicines in a manner similar to the Oregon Psilocybin Initiative. We invite everyone to continue these discussions in person at MAPS’ Psychedelic Science 2023 conference at the Denver Convention Center from June 19-23, the world’s largest psychedelic conference ever convened. You can learn more about the conference and register at [psychedelicscience.org](https://www.psychedelicscience.org).



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