

Supervised Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy in End-of-Life Care

Clinical research demonstrates that supervised psychedelic-assisted therapy may decrease depression and anxiety in some patients suffering from life-threatening illnesses and may relieve distress.¹

To promote quality end-of-life care and provide peace of mind at the end of life, Compassion & Choices supports ongoing research related to supervised psychedelic-assisted therapy.

What is Supervised Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy?

Supervised psychedelic-assisted therapy includes therapeutic preparation for a psychedelic session, the psychedelic session, and subsequent visits with the clinician. During the session, the patient, in a controlled and clinician-supervised setting, receives a specific dose of a psychedelic compound. The patient is carefully monitored throughout the session and receives follow-up visits with qualified clinicians to support integration of the experience and to identify opportunities for change in the patient's life challenges and experience.

¹Griffiths RR, Johnson MW, Carducci MA, Umbricht A, Richards WA, Richards BD, Cosimano MP, Klinedinst MA. Psilocybin produces substantial and sustained decreases in depression and anxiety in patients with life-threatening cancer: A randomized double-blind trial. *J Psychopharmacol.* 2016 Dec;30(12):1181-1197. Doi: 10.1177/0269881116675513. PMID: 27909165; PMCID: PMC5367557.

Though studies to date are limited, promising research indicates that supervised psychedelic-assisted therapy may help relieve feelings of distress for people with terminal illness and provide an opportunity for connection during the end-of-life experience. Further research has the potential to develop a medical treatment that, when administered in a supervised setting and using best practices and protocols, can reduce trauma and distress for people with terminal illnesses when other medical therapies have been unsuccessful. Supervised psychedelic-assisted therapy is currently only available through clinical studies.

What are psychedelics?

Psychedelics are a class of psychoactive substances that produce changes in perception, mood and cognitive processes. Most of the current research focused on supervised psychedelic-assisted therapy involves the use of psilocybin, a compound naturally found in some wild mushrooms that can also be produced synthetically.

Current status of psychedelic research

Established data and research on supervised psychedelic-assisted therapy offers comprehensive analysis and evidence for improved end-of-life care practices and could determine the standard of care to regulate supervised psychedelic-assisted therapy for safe, effective medical use.

Several psychedelics have completed Phase I and Phase II clinical trials sanctioned by the

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat anxiety and depression due to diagnosis with a terminal illness. Thus far, psilocybin-assisted therapy trials, which include very small sample sizes, demonstrate potential for safe and effective use at the end of life. Phase III clinical trials, which include sample sizes in the thousands, are currently underway. The results of these trials will allow researchers to more accurately assess the safety and efficacy of supervised psychedelic-assisted therapy.

Current status of psychedelic policy

Efforts at federal and state levels would broaden access to psychedelics through legalization for “medical use” and under right-to-try laws, which, in theory, allow use of experimental drugs as a last resort, when other treatments have been determined ineffective.