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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 3 March 2017 11:27 AM
To: LRRCS
Subject: Drug law reform submission

I am writing to propose the legalisation of traditional, psychedelic drugs in Victoria. The current legal status of drugs such as LSD, psilocybin, mescaline and DMT has created a situation where users are persecuted or restricted from using these relatively safe substances.

Not only would the legalisation of the above substances remove many problems associated with prohibition it would create positive opportunities for improvement of the lives of many through therapeutic administration.

Whilst all use of drugs can lead to problems, attempting to solve the problems through prohibition has been proven not to work. The basic premise of prohibition is that by banning these substances people will stop using them. Data from Australia and around the world does not support this theory. Prohibition ignores the nature of human beings (and other animals for that matter) to desire changing and experimenting with their consciousness. In many instances prohibition has in fact worsened the extent and severity of problems. People will continue to use the substances but at higher concentrations and in a more risky manner. Prohibition is largely an illusion of regulation, in practice it is an organised crime free for all with little government control over any harmful factors involved in the market.

In the wake of the failure of prohibition some politicians have advocated harsher penalties yet this has only served to push up prices, attracting more players to the business with a more lucrative market on offer. A more rational approach would be to accept punitive measures have not worked and analyse the changes that regulators can make to improve outcomes for the community. Our aim should be to control and influence what we can without pursuing an idealistic strategy that is failing the community at large. Persisting with a failed policy and the harms that come with it is neither intelligent nor progressive. To move forward as a society we need to continuously improve, develop and grow through iterative implementation and review of regulatory policy.

Prohibition makes recreational use more hazardous than a legal, regulated market. It makes identifying substances and dosages difficult and potentially dangerous for users. Dealers may replace or dilute expensive substances with cheaper, more hazardous substances. There is no quality control standard employed by illegal labs. Dosages can vary significantly which can lead to problems for the user. For example, Year 12 student Henry Kwan died after taking what he thought was LSD but turned out to be NBOME. If the current policy leads to people dying then it is imperative the policy be improved. To do nothing and simply wash our hands of it by saying "These individuals chose to break the law and now they have suffered the consequences" (implying it was their own fault) does not absolve policy makers of the responsibility of what has happened. If a policy can be put in place that prevents these types of deaths then we have done something positive and ethical to improve the regulation of these substances, even if it appears to be counterintuitive.

Prohibition creates a climate of fear and oppression which can lead to mental health issues such as paranoia, anxiety and depression. Albert Camus once wrote: "For those who are too uneasy of themselves their native land is the one that negates them". People define their identities by what gives them the greatest meaning, satisfaction and pleasure in life. For many psychedelic users it is the psychedelic experience that forms part of their identity. To deny legitimacy of one's identity or persecute people for actualising their identity is an unnecessary and destructive social control. The persecution of users can lead to social problems of bullying, alienation, racial discrimination and difficulty in finding/maintaining employment. It is important to distinguish the differences between the effects of the substance and the effects of the drug policy upon users of the substance. The supporters of prohibition like to confuse the two to support their position.

Oppression has been proven to be a leading cause of mental illness along with co-morbid physical illness and early death. Oppressive policies lead to social decay through the enforcing of a fearful, anxious and distrustful mindset.

The individual's thoughts may also become manifest in negative behaviours and interpersonal relations. Such negative relations only serve to perpetuate the corrosion of social well being.

Prohibition currently prevents medical professionals from legitimately using said substances for therapeutic use. Many studies in recent years have found significant benefits of psychedelic substances for conditions such as depression, addiction, end of life anxiety, OCD and PTSD. For example LSD was used to treat alcoholism whereby the researchers found that by giving the subjects an uplifting, if not transcendent, experience they would seek to reduce or eliminate their alcohol consumption. The participants felt they had something better to live for and hence re-evaluated their life choices. This effect has helped people free themselves from addictions to other substances (including opiates and methamphetamine) and also prevent suicide.

Suicide claims over 2000 Australian lives per year. The most commonly prescribed antidepressants actually increase the likelihood of suicide.

A therapy that has been proven to work with minimal, and far less detrimental side effects than current legal medications, should be legal. Adverse reactions are rare in research settings and deaths have never occurred. The health risks of using psychedelic substances are minimal to none, as has been proven by hundreds of clinical trials supervised by qualified medical personnel. Conventional legal medications such as antidepressants and antipsychotics have far worse side effects including permanent anhedonia, severe (and permanent) sexual dysfunction, metabolic syndrome, diabetes, suicidal ideation and homicidal ideation. In the last ten years deaths from psychiatric treatment average at 350 per annum. This is unacceptably high for illnesses that are not physical. Improving mental health treatment outcomes must become a priority.

On a personal note I have tried LSD and psilocybin myself and found them highly agreeable. As a child I suffered from delayed development and failed to thrive from infancy. My mother was a cruel and sadistic person who could not show any love for me. My slow emotional and mental development caused social difficulties (including bullying) for me as a child and teenager which lead to a state of deep depression which lasted for most of my formative years. When I first tried LSD at the age of eighteen I found myself transformed with a whole new perspective on life. A huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders and I felt I could live a much fuller emotional life. Psychedelics have helped me find meaning, satisfaction and purpose in life.

Even people without mental health issues can benefit from taking psychedelics – users have reported in scientific studies an increased sense of well being and better quality of life after the immediate effects of the substances have worn off. Follow up studies in psilocybin experiments have found participants rated the experience as one of the most significant in their lives – rating it alongside marriage and having children. Users have also found their later lives greatly enriched for having the experience(s) and often make lifestyle changes according to revelations discovered during the experience.

Researchers found 20% of people became involved in activism after taking psychedelics¹. The sense of unity makes people often feel a greater connection and empathy with the environment and other humans. For example after the experience they may resolve to stop eating animal products in an effort to reduce cruelty in the world. Psychedelics commonly give people a sense of a higher purpose in life and help people find meaning in their regular lives. Society is crying out for something deeper, more meaningful; beyond the materialist consumerism of eating more food, buying more electronic gadgets, purchasing a shinier car and changing wardrobes every three months.

Psychedelic experiences open up people to non-linear logic in their thinking, thus developing innovative and creative strategies in their lifestyles and businesses. California was a hotbed of psychedelic activity in the 1960's. Shortly thereafter it developed an IT industry which has become the engine room of the US economy. There are many high profile and lesser known workers in the industry who were inspired by their use of psychedelics. Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple, along with many internet pioneers have used LSD. One might question whether a causal link may be made here as psychedelic drugs tend to attract people who are intellectual or creative in the first place. In that case it could be claimed a legal supply of psychedelics may very likely attract a host of creative and intelligent types to Victoria.

I believe the current policy is based upon ignorance and is supported by vested interests (who do not have the community's best interests in mind). Psychedelics were not banned due to health concerns but tabloid media sensationalism, conservative idealism and a flawed sense of ethics. Australia, along with most other western nations, banned psychedelics without any investigation into the health effects of the drugs. It was a populist move

to appease foreign powers and ignorant, conservative voters. Blame and punishment are sensation driven urges lacking a rational basis in evidence. A revision of the policy in light of modern scientific evidence is long overdue.

All drugs can have negative health and social effects. It is important to mitigate these effects with a policy that accepts the reality of human behaviour and yet minimises the harm. I propose a model of legal psychedelic availability whereby the drugs are manufactured by an accredited laboratory working to the appropriate quality standards. The drugs should be sold by a limited number of authorised outlets – I imagine a handful of shops would be sufficient to service the entire population of Victoria. The shop could be open for business during the day on weekdays (Monday to Thursday) and closed in the evenings and on weekends to discourage risky, ad hoc usage during drinking hours. The sales should be restricted to people of an appropriate age, say 16 or 18, and not sold to people who are obviously affected by substances already. The drugs should not be advertised or promoted in any manner.

The unit price should be standard per dose, not offering discounts for bulk purchasing. The shop could provide information to users on the likely effects and potential harms of the drugs, just as we do for tobacco or alcohol. Guidelines for safe usage should also be provided along with information on where to seek help for problem usage.

Economically the sales could be taxed at such a rate that covers the cost of providing the substances and some extra for government overheads. The staff should be paid a salary with no pay incentive for extra sales. Ultimately the business would be best run by the government itself to prevent any undue promotion of the substances for profit gains. The basic aim is to provide the substances to those who seek them, to cover the existing black market, without expanding the market unnecessarily.

Possible negative outcomes of legalisation:

Greater availability leading to an increase in usage.

The substances are largely self limiting due to the tolerance factor.

There is little point continuing regular usage as the intensity of the effects diminishes rapidly after the initial dose and it takes several days of abstinence to restore the effectiveness. Whilst there may be a modest increase in the number of people who try these substances the improvement in safety for users will counteract any health concerns.

The prohibition of alcohol in the US did reduce the number of consumers yet those who continued to imbibe faced the risk of (and many even succumbed to) methanol poisoning.

Drug tourism.

People may travel to Victoria in search of drugs they would not be able to acquire otherwise. I foresee this effect as being minimal as these drugs are already commonly available for mail order from the internet.

A small percentage of users may be enticed to Victoria but given the patterns of usage it is unlikely we will be creating a drug ghetto.

The local population will go crazy.

Whilst I concede some of these drugs may be contraindicated with certain mental health conditions and may exasperate existing or underlying illnesses; there is no credible evidence of these drugs causing illness by themselves. As stated above, much of the illness relating to drugs is a by-product of the oppression faced by users. In clinical trials for therapeutic use of these substances patients have come to no harm, in complete contrast to the lurid stories published in the tabloid media.

Car accidents.

These drugs should not be used whilst driving or operating heavy machinery. Tests for impairment will be necessary and should be conducted regardless of the legal status of these drugs, since people are using the drugs anyway.

Victoria has a reputation for high standards of education and research, with a highly intelligent population. We have a human rights charter that values ethics, compassion and personal freedom. Allowing people to pursue their lifestyle choices is integral to maintaining and improving the wellbeing of the population.

Health, safety, freedom and prosperity are all valued qualities in life by the majority of the Victorian population. When forming good policy it is prudent to consider the most important values involved rather than appeal to the warped mindsets of sensationalist and irrational media.

Few right minded people would consider it just or fair to lock people up for trying to experience something inside their own head but this is effectively what the criminalisation of psychedelics entails. Cognitive and somatic liberties are the freedoms that underpin all others. We cannot experience any freedom unless we are free to choose how we think or feel. Changing the legal status of psychedelics may look like a risky move politically yet to do so would bring many benefits and negate many problems with the current policy.

Submitted by:

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(1) Luke, D & Yanakieva, S "The transpersonal psychedelic experience and change in ecological attitude and behaviour" June 2016.

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