

Office of the Governor – News Release – Breakthrough Therapies Task Force Signals New Era of Wellness and Resilience

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HONOLULU – The Office of Wellness and Resilience announces the establishment of the Breakthrough Therapies Task Force, which aims to assist the state in expanding therapeutic access to two key substances: MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine) and psilocybin, both of which received “breakthrough therapy” status by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2017 and 2018/2019, respectively.

The task force conducted its first meeting on Aug. 29. It comprises local physicians, psychiatrists, mental health professionals and government partners. This first meeting represents a significant milestone in advancing the recognition and understanding of the potential benefits of therapeutic psychedelic access in Hawai‘i. Members include Hawai‘i-based mental health professionals, government agency representatives, legislators, physicians, therapists and more. Full list of members:

1. Lorrin Kim, Chief Policy Officer and Legislative Coordinator, Department of Health
2. Tia L. R. Hartsock, MSW, MSCJA; Director, Office of Wellness and Resilience, Office of the Governor
3. Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair of Health and Human Services Committee, Hawai‘i State Senate
4. Senator Chris Lee, Assistant Majority Whip, Hawai‘i State Senate
5. Melanie Martin, Department of Public Safety, Deputy Director of Administration
6. Dr. Sean Munnely, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist and Addiction Specialist; Veteran’s Affairs (VA)
7. Oriana Filiaci, MA; Hawai‘i Pacific Health
8. Ashley Lukens, Ph.D.; Director and Co-Founder, Clarity Project
9. Kristina Rodriguez, RN-BSN, IFMCP; Integration Coach, Krysalis Lifestyle Medicine
10. Heather Lusk, MSW, LCSW; Executive Director, Hawai‘i Health and Harm Reduction Center
11. Nikos Leverenz, President, Drug Policy Forum of Hawai‘i and Grants and Advancement Manager, Hawai‘i Health and Harm Reduction Center

Although psychedelic plants have been used in indigenous cultures for thousands of years, modern science is now catching up. Aligned with a growing national movement led by Oregon, which passed its first therapeutic psilocybin access program in 2020, followed by Colorado in 2022, these initiatives to expand access are rooted in the growing body of research that is

establishing psychedelics as the most promising new frontier in psychiatric care since the advent of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). Research has shown that both psilocybin and MDMA have significant and unprecedented efficacy in the clinical treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), addiction, end-of-life anxiety in terminal patients, eating disorders, treatment-resistant depression and more. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#)

“We are now on the precipice of an exciting movement in health care and consciousness. The FDA designation of MDMA and psilocybin as breakthrough therapies ushers in a potentially paradigm-shifting moment. For this to be done safely, it is crucial to create a multidisciplinary task force of experts. These individuals will be responsible for creating guidelines for safe and responsible practices here in Hawai‘i.”

– Sean Munnely, M.D., Honolulu, Hawai‘i

The task force will complete its final report by the end of the year. A primary goal of the task force is to leverage the learnings from Colorado and Oregon, and prepare for the potential FDA approval of these breakthrough therapies by laying the foundation for a regulated psychedelic therapy program. This foundation will specifically address questions of supply, licensing for guides and integration coaches, and administrative needs. It will examine issues of safety, access and affordability of care.

In line with Hawai‘i’s commitment to wellness, resilience and mental health care, the Breakthrough Therapies Task Force underscores the state’s dedication to exploring effective and innovative approaches to mental health treatment. By embracing the potential of breakthrough therapies and creating a regulated psychedelic therapy program, Hawai‘i aims to provide its residents with comprehensive, compassionate and effective therapeutic care options.

To learn more about breakthrough therapies, a public event is being hosted by the Clarity Project: *Breaking Through Trauma: The Case for Psilocybin & MDMA* on Friday, Sept. 8 from 5:30 to 8 p.m. at Ka Waiwai in Honolulu. This event features Dr. Jennifer Mitchell, a professor in the University of California at San Francisco Department of Neurology and Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development at the San Francisco VA. Her team has evaluated MDMA for the treatment of PTSD, evaluated psilocybin for the treatment of demoralization and has FDA-funded projects to study the therapeutic benefits of psychedelics. For more information about the event, visit clarityproject.org.

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