

Utah lawmakers punt on magic mushroom therapy proposal

February 24 2023, by Sam Metz



A vendor bags psilocybin mushrooms at a cannabis marketplace on May 24, 2019 in Los Angeles. Lawmakers throughout the United States are weighing proposals to legalize psychedelic mushrooms for people. They say alarming suicide rates and a shortage of traditional mental health practitioners has led them to consider research into alternative treatments for depression and anxiety, including so-called magic mushrooms. Credit: AP Photo/Richard Vogel, File

A pilot program in Utah that would have allowed thousands of patients to consume psychedelic mushrooms for therapeutic use failed to advance in the state Senate on Wednesday, effectively ending its chances of passage as lawmakers prepare to adjourn for the year next week.

The Senate's health and human services committee neither advanced nor rejected the measure, with Republican leaders proposing more time to examine the issue.

Even if it had advanced for further discussion, the proposal likely would've faced an "uphill battle" getting passed this year, said State Sen. Jake Anderegg, a Lehi Republican, based on his talks with lawmakers.

Utah was among several states [across the political spectrum](#) considering the use of psychedelic mushrooms this year. Proponents hoped the success of the state's medical marijuana regulations could sway members of the Republican-supermajority statehouse to adopt a similar framework.

Advocates representing patients and libertarian-leaning groups initially hoped a narrow proposal focused on [health care](#) and safety could gain traction. But the proposal's chances diminished last week when Gov. Spencer Cox and Senate President Stuart Adams voiced opposition—less than a week after state Sen. Luz Escamilla, a Salt Lake City Democrat, introduced it.

The [pilot program](#) would have let 5,000 patients suffering from [mental illnesses](#) including post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety to consume magic mushrooms under a therapist's supervision. She argued it would add resources to address Utah's high suicide rates and mental health practitioner shortage.

"It's just not there yet," Cox said last week regarding Escamilla's

proposed pilot program. "We got there with medical marijuana. I just don't believe the science is there" regarding psychedelics.

"I think there are some serious consequences and side effects societally as well as as well as medically that I'm just not comfortable with," said Cox, who is up for reelection next year.

Lawmakers' decision to not advance the proposal without significant discussion comes one year after they greenlit a Republican-sponsored measure creating a [task force](#) to study mental illness and the therapeutic use certain drugs including magic mushrooms. In October, the task force [released](#) a report that noted the potential benefits of mushrooms, yet recommended Utah wait until the federal Food and Drug Administration complete its fast-tracked drug approval review before taking additional action on psychedelic-assisted therapy.

Psychedelics including magic mushrooms remain illegal on a federal level yet several states including Colorado and Oregon have taken steps to decriminalize their possession or legalize their consumption for therapeutic purposes. Proposals to study psychedelics for therapy have [gained traction throughout the Untied States](#) including Republican strongholds like Utah, Texas and Missouri.

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