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**NOVA “CAN PSYCHEDELICS CURE?” EXPLORES LATEST SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ON HALLUCINOGENIC DRUGS AND THEIR POTENTIAL BENEFITS AS TREATMENT FOR CONDITIONS INCLUDING ADDICTION, PTSD, AND DEPRESSION**

***New film follows scientists re-examining the efficacy of mind-altering substances and surprising new discoveries that may reveal whether psychedelics could have profoundly positive clinical impacts on the brain***

**Premieres Wednesday, October 19, 2022 at 9pm ET/8C on PBS**

**Also available for streaming at** [**pbs.org/nova**](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/video/can-psychedelics-cure/)**,** [**NOVA on YouTube**](https://www.youtube.com/user/NOVAonline)**, and via the** [**PBS Video app**](https://www.pbs.org/pbs-video-app/)

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**BOSTON, MA; October 11, 2022—CAN PSYCHEDELICS CURE?,** a one-hour special from **NOVA**, a **production of GBH**, explores new research around hallucinogenic drugs—popularly called psychedelics—that may indicate profoundly positive clinical impacts, helping patients struggling with a range of afflictions in the brain. Although psychedelics have been used by human societies for thousands of years, scientists are now taking a closer look at many of these mind-altering substances, both natural and synthetic, and conducting clinical trials to help unlock new ways to treat conditions like PTSD, addiction and depression. **CAN PSYCHEDELICS CURE?** premieres **Wednesday, October 19, 2022 at 9pm ET/8C on PBS**. The film will also be available for streaming at[**pbs.org/nova**](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/video/can-psychedelics-cure/)**,** [**NOVA on YouTube**](https://www.youtube.com/user/NOVAonline)**,** and via the [**PBS Video app**](https://www.pbs.org/pbs-video-app/).

Psychedelic drugs rose in popularity in American culture in the 1960’s. They became known for their transformative, mind-bending recreational effects, but thanks to cutting-edge new research, they might now offer hope for treating devastating mental health conditions. Users report that these drugs bring about an altered state of consciousness, sometimes accompanied by hallucinations or heightened sensitivity to colors, sounds and patterns. Many also report a loss of ego accompanied by profound feelings of empathy and connection to others, making them often feel changed in positive ways. For years, scientific study of the direct effects of hallucinogens on the brain has been extremely limited. In the United States, psilocybin, the mind-altering molecule found in magic mushrooms, has been classified as a Schedule I drug—alongside heroin, a highly addictive substance—since President Nixon declared war on drugs in 1970. Now, clinical trials across the country are conducting experimental treatments that combine the use of psychedelic drugs with conventional talk therapy sessions to measure the treatment’s effects on people living with alcohol use disorder and other mental health conditions.

“Since psychedelics have re-entered the public consciousness in a major way, we felt it was important to examine the latest clinical research on the drugs’ effectiveness in mental health treatments,” **said NOVA Co-Executive Producer Julia Cort**. “CAN PSYCHEDELICS CURE? upholds our mission to illuminate the complex science behind issues that people are confronting in their daily lives and provide answers that help them make informed decisions.”

**CAN PSYCHEDELICS CURE?** follows a clinical trial at NYU, focusing on patient Jon Kostas, whose severe alcohol addiction began when he was a teenager. Under the supervision of psychiatrists and therapists, Jon experienced a remarkable recovery, and immediately stopped drinking alcohol after his first dosing session. Though that result was particularly dramatic, scientists have witnessed a notable improvement overall across the trial—the psilocybin plus psychotherapy group recorded a 50% reduction in drinking compared to the group treated with psychotherapy alone.

Another group featured in the film, consisting of cancer patients afflicted with major depressive disorder, also experienced impressive benefits: 82% of those participating in the trial had more than a 50% reduction in depression symptoms, improving their overall quality of life. Scott Ostrom, an Iraq War veteran living with severe PTSD, participated in a Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) clinical trial and experienced significant emotional breakthroughs as a result of MDMA-assisted therapeutic treatment. Notably, nearly 70% of participants emerging from the MAPS MDMA-assisted therapy trials were found to no longer qualify for a PTSD diagnosis.

“It’s amazing to see such dramatic responses from participants in some of these limited clinical trials of psychedelic therapies, but it’s also critical to understand the neuroscience behind these drugs along with the potential risks and ethical concerns around the safety of patients,” said **NOVA Co-Executive Producer Chris Schmidt**. “The film also gives viewers important context around the long history of hallucinogenic use by Indigenous peoples, and how those rituals and customs can help inform scientific settings for psychedelic-assisted therapy.”

Neuroscientists featured in the film, such as Dr. Yasmin Hurd, Director of the Addiction Institute at the Mount Sinai Behavioral Health System, break down the science driving psychedelics’ effects on the brain. Early discoveries demonstrate psychedelics’ activation of specific serotonin receptors in the brain that are involved in mood and unusual states of consciousness—potentially leading to new nerve cell connections, or even growth, that can help repair deteriorating nerve cells damaged by the effects of substance abuse. The key difference between psychedelic therapy and other currently available treatments may be in the way that psychedelics can allow the brain to change, rather than simply suppressing symptoms such as craving.

But for some, psychedelics trigger fear and feelings of loss of control. Given the drugs’ conscious-altering effect, they can make users incredibly vulnerable, and pose significant risk especially for people with a personal or family history of psychiatric disorders like schizophrenia, bipolar or psychotic disorders. While early results from ongoing clinical trials are promising, scientists urge caution around the use of these substances. Rigorous protocols regarding a patient’s safety must be followed and patients should be screened for a history of mental illness before taking these psychoactive substances. A bad trip can easily go awry, which is why scientists stress the importance of administering treatment in a therapeutic setting.

In addition to contextualizing the neural impact of psychedelics and the ethical concerns, **CAN PSYCHEDELICS CURE?** alsoexamines the cultural and societal history of hallucinogenic usage in Indigenous communities. Psychedelics have long been regarded as a credible, even ritualistic natural form of medicine by many Native American tribes. In North America, the ceremonial use of peyote dates back thousands of years. But the psychedelic renaissance is attracting unwanted attention to what some Indegenous peoples regard as a precious and fragile sacrament. Peyote’s habitat in South Texas, for example, is small and now being threatened by poachers and outside interests. Scientists have been inspired by Indigenous practitioners’ careful and non-recreational use of these powerful substances, and by the Indigenous practice of only taking psychoactive substances in the right environment and frame of mind.

As of this year, MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD is in the final stages of the FDA approval process, while psilocybin-assisted therapies for major depression and other conditions are also in the FDA pipeline. Still, there is significant concern about the lack of a universal standard of care or code of ethics on how to ensure people’s safety when taking psychedelic drugs, whether in a recreational or clinical setting. There are also concerns about access and affordability for many, including communities of color, and the need for culturally sensitive care. While hope runs high for psychedelic medicine, scientists are quick to emphasize the inherent risks that accompany these powerful drugs’ potential to heal. In the meantime, they are cautiously proceeding with further research.

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**About NOVA**

NOVA is the most popular primetime science series on American television, demystifying the scientific and technological concepts that shape and define our lives, our planet, and our universe. The PBS series is also one of the most widely distributed science programs around the world, and is a multimedia, multiplatform brand reaching more than 55 million Americans every year on TV and online. NOVA’s important and inspiring stories of human ingenuity, exploration, and the quest for knowledge are regularly recognized with the industry’s most prestigious awards. As part of its mission to make the scientific enterprise accessible to all, NOVA is committed to diversity and inclusiveness in all its work, from the production process to the range of stories we tell and the voices we amplify. In addition, science educators across the country rely on NOVA for resources used in the classroom as well as in museums, libraries, and after-school programs. NOVA is a production of GBH; more information can be found at pbs.org/nova, or by following NOVA on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

**About PBS**

PBS, with nearly 350 member stations, offers all Americans the opportunity to explore new ideas and new worlds through television and digital content. Each month, PBS reaches nearly 100 million people through television and nearly 28 million people online, inviting them to experience the worlds of science, history, nature and public affairs; to hear diverse viewpoints; and to take front row seats to world-class drama and performances. PBS’ broad array of programs has been consistently honored by the industry’s most coveted award competitions. Teachers of children from pre-K through 12th grade turn to PBS for digital content and services that help bring classroom lessons to life. Decades of research confirms that PBS’ premier children’s media service, PBS KIDS, helps children build critical literacy, math and social-emotional skills, enabling them to find success in school and life. Delivered through member stations, PBS KIDS offers high-quality educational content on TV – including a new 24/7 channel, online at pbskids.org, via an array of mobile apps and in communities across America. More information about PBS is available at www.pbs.org, one of the leading dot-org websites on the internet, or by following PBS on Twitter, Facebook or through our apps for mobile and connected devices. Specific program information and updates for press are available at pbs.org/pressroom or by following PBS Pressroom on Twitter.

**About GBH**

GBH is the leading multiplatform creator for public media in America. As the largest producer of content for PBS and partner to NPR and PRX, GBH delivers compelling experiences, stories and information to audiences wherever they are. GBH produces digital and broadcast programming that engages, illuminates and inspires, through drama and science, history, arts, culture and journalism. It is the creator of such signature programs as MASTERPIECE, ANTIQUES ROADSHOW, FRONTLINE, NOVA, AMERICAN EXPERIENCE, *Arthur* and *Molly of Denali,* as well as WORLD Channel and a catalog of streaming series, podcasts and on-demand video. With studios and a newsroom headquartered in Boston, GBH reaches across New England with GBH 89.7, Boston’s Local NPR®; CRB Classical 99.5; and CAI, the Cape and Islands NPR® station. Dedicated to making media accessible to and inclusive of our diverse culture, GBH is a pioneer in delivering media to those who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind and visually impaired. GBH creates curriculum-based digital content for educators nationwide with PBS LearningMedia and has been recognized with hundreds of the nation’s premier broadcast, digital and journalism awards. Find more information at wgbh.org.

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