



The University of Colorado Denver Center for Psychedelic Research (UCDCPR) – Introduction and Overview

Presented by Vivian Shyu



Introduction

Our Mission

Established in June 2024, the University of Colorado Denver Center for Psychedelic Research (UCDCPR) is committed to advancing the scientific understanding and therapeutic potential of psychedelics through pioneering research and strategic partnerships. We conduct studies that explore the biological, psychological, and societal dimensions of psychedelics, emphasizing their use in treating psychiatric and neurological conditions and enhancing our understanding of consciousness. By uniting diverse scholars and disciplines, we aim to generate impactful knowledge, improve mental health care, guide public health policy, and build access to care for underserved and marginalized communities. Through our training programs, we will develop skilled, ethical practitioners.

Our Guiding Values

- **Scientific Excellence:** We prioritize rigorous, evidence-based research on psychedelics and their therapeutic potential.
- **Innovation:** We embrace groundbreaking approaches to mental health and consciousness studies, transforming care and building knowledge through research.
- **Collaboration:** We leverage transdisciplinary partnerships to tackle complex challenges and drive meaningful change.
- **Equity and Access:** We ensure psychedelic therapies reach underserved communities, promoting inclusive mental health care.
- **Education and Training:** We deliver comprehensive training programs, preparing practitioners for transformative therapies.

Motivations

Why CU Denver?

- **Colorado's Legalization (Proposition 122):** The November 2024 passage of Proposition 122, the Natural Medicine Health Act, legalized psychedelic use for adults over 21 and its use in assisted therapies. This necessitates research to understand its application and impact on public health. CU Denver researchers are actively collaborating with state officials to ensure research informs policy development.
- **CU Denver's Resources:** As a public urban research university, CU Denver possesses the infrastructure and expert faculty across multiple disciplines to conduct groundbreaking research in psychedelics. Its commitment to equity-serving positions it well to address the need for equitable access to mental healthcare, and its strong collaborative network across the University of Colorado system broadens its reach.
- **Expert Leadership:** Jim Grigsby, Executive Director and Founder of the UCDCPR, is an internationally recognized scholar and leader in the field of psychedelic research. He has published extensively, including a textbook, and is co-principal investigator of a national study on the therapeutic use of psilocybin.

Why Now?

- **Rapid Growth:** The field of psychedelic research is poised for significant growth, with the potential for FDA approval for MDMA and psilocybin-assisted therapies in 2025. This creates an urgent need to prepare for integrating these therapies into mainstream healthcare, including establishing best practices, training standards, and equitable access models. UCDCPR is well-positioned to conduct this critical research and develop practitioner training programs.
- **Colorado's Unique Framework:** Colorado's Proposition 122 established a framework for the use of natural substances, including psilocybin, making it the first state to legalize both therapeutic and personal use of certain psychedelics. This presents a unique opportunity to study real-world impacts and provide valuable insights for other jurisdictions facing similar policy considerations.
- **Addressing the Mental Health Crisis:** The U.S. is experiencing a mental health crisis, with a significant need for new and effective treatments. Colorado's mental health system is similarly strained. Psychedelic-assisted therapies offer a potential solution, and UCDCPR is committed to exploring their efficacy in addressing this critical need.

UCDCPR is at the forefront of psychedelic research, conducting groundbreaking clinical trials and basic science investigations to expand our understanding of psychedelics and their potential to treat mental health conditions. We will also provide comprehensive training to prepare the next generation of skilled and ethical psychedelic practitioners.

Aims and Planned Actions

RESEARCH

AIM 1: We will conduct **clinical trials** of psychedelic and related substances for use in therapies addressing emotional/behavioral conditions, neurological disorders, functional neurological disorders, and inflammatory disorders.

These conditions will include:

- Psychological, psychiatric, emotional and behavioral conditions, such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, and addiction
- Neurodegenerative disorders, including stroke, traumatic brain injury, and neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's
- Functional neurological disorders, such as non-epileptic seizures
- Inflammatory disorders, including chronic autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and systemic lupus erythematosus
- Other challenging conditions, such as eating disorders, gender dysphoria, and distress associated with terminal and chronic illnesses

AIM 2: We will conduct **basic science** research to better understand the fundamental biological and neurological mechanisms underlying the therapeutic effects—and potential risks—of psychedelics. This research aims to answer questions that go beyond demonstrating whether a particular psychedelic is effective for a specific condition.

These research investigations will include:

- The effects of psychedelics on neural plasticity, neurogenesis, and inflammation
- The interplay between psychedelics, the gut-brain axis, and neuroinflammation in the context of mood and anxiety disorders
- The effects of psychedelics on cognition, particularly "chemobrain," the cognitive impairment that often accompanies cancer chemotherapy

POLICY

AIM 3: We will conduct research on the **public health, social and economic impacts** associated with our state's passage of Proposition 122, which decriminalized certain natural medicines and allowed for their regulated use in therapeutic settings.

This research will include:

- Studying the implementation of Proposition 122 and its effects on Colorado communities
- Examining the sociological and political consequences of decriminalization and regulation of psychedelics
- Investigating the impact of legalization on patterns of psychedelic use, mental health outcomes, and criminal behavior

AIM 4: We will work to inform the **development of effective coverage and payment policies** for the therapeutic use of psychedelics and for ensuring equitable, affordable access.

This work will involve:

- Working with government agencies, including Medicare and Medicaid, to develop policies for coverage/reimbursement of psychedelic-assisted therapies
- Addressing the unique challenges posed by the unconventional treatment regimen and timeline of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy compared to traditional mental health care
- Ensuring equitable access to treatment for marginalized and underserved populations

EDUCATION

AIM 5: We will **provide education and training** in the clinical use of psychedelics, developing and implementing training programs for students and professionals, including a state-approved Natural Medicine-Assisted Therapy training program to prepare practitioners for licensure (application for approval in progress).

These programs will:

- Equip practitioners with the necessary knowledge and skills to provide safe and effective psychedelic-assisted therapy
- Prepare practitioners to meet the requirements for state credentialing and licensure under Proposition 122
- Address the specific needs of different types of facilitators, including licensed and unlicensed individuals

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Who we are

Leadership Team



• **Jim Grigsby, PhD, Founder, Executive Director:** Dr. Grigsby is a Professor of Psychology at CU Denver with an additional appointment in the Dept of Medicine. His work encompasses cognitive neuroscience and neuropsychology and their intersection with health psychology. An internationally recognized scholar in psychedelics, he is a principal lead on a large, national study exploring psilocybin's therapeutic potential for end-of-life care. His research has been supported by grants from the National Institutes of Health. He has published over 125 peer-reviewed articles and four books, including the co-editing of the 2021 *Handbook of Medical Hallucinations*, the only comprehensive textbook on the subject.



• **Shandra Levey, PhD, Associate Director:** Dr. Levey is an Associate Professor of Family Medicine at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, Director of Integrated Primary Care and Behavioral Health, and the Primary Care Psychology Fellowship Director. Dr. Levey is a co-investigator and psychedelic-assisted psychotherapist for an NCI-funded study of psilocybin to treat existential distress among people with late-stage cancer.



• **Stacy Fischer, MD, Medical Director and Director of Clinical Trials:** Dr. Fischer is a Professor of General Internal Medicine and a board-certified Geriatrician and Palliative Care clinician. She is also a Program Leader in Cancer Prevention and Control at the University of Colorado Comprehensive Cancer Center and co-directs the T32 Multidisciplinary Palliative Care Research Post-Doctoral training program. Her research focuses on improving palliative care outcomes for underserved and vulnerable populations.



• **Vivian Shyu, PhD, Director of Education:** Dr. Shyu is a Teaching Professor in the CU Denver Psychology Department, specializing in cognitive psychology and neuroscience. Her current research focuses on patterns of psychedelic drug use and associated outcomes, as related to legislative changes. She is also a MAPS-trained MDMA-assisted therapy facilitator.



• **Laura Argys, PhD, Policy Researcher:** Dr. Argys is a Professor of Economics and Associate Dean of Research and Creative Activities at CU Denver. She specializes in labor economics and researches the effects of policy on child well-being. As Associate Dean, she will work to expand research and creative activities among faculty and students. She brings her health economic expertise to the Center's research looking at psychedelic use and legislative change.



• **Molly Sullan, PhD, Clinical Researcher:** Dr. Sullan is a Clinical research neuropsychologist at the VA Eastern Colorado Healthcare System. She is a co-investigator on multiple grants focused on health-related outcomes following traumatic brain injury and military-related blast and environmental/toxic exposures. She has presented to clinical teams on psychedelic-assisted treatment for neurologic disorders, such as acquired brain injury.



• **Christopher Lowry, PhD, Basic/Translational Science Researcher:** Dr. Lowry is a Professor in the Department of Integrative Physiology at the University of Colorado Boulder. He is interested in the therapeutic potential of psychedelics and how these substances interact with the gut-brain axis and influence neuroinflammation as possible treatments for mood and anxiety disorders. His research combines preclinical studies with translational approaches, with the goal of using basic scientific findings to develop new therapeutic strategies.



• **Michelle Comstock, PhD: CLAS Dean's Office, UCDCPR Program collaborator.**

• **Ben Greenwood, PhD: Research collaborator**

• **Kristin Kilbourn, PhD: Research collaborator**

• **Geneva Hallett, Program Administrator**

Board Members

• **Lee Tuchfarber, Chair:** CEO of RENEW Senior Communities

• **Chris Romer:** CO Chamber of Commerce executive

• **Briony Catlow, PhD:** Director of Knoebel Institute for Healthy Aging

• **Steve Briggs:** Mediator/Arbitrator Judicial Arbitrator Group; retired appellate judge

Get Involved

- For more information about our work or our training programs, please visit our website by searching for [UCDCPR](#). There you can join our mailing list to receive updates and news.
- If you would like to make a donation to support the UCDCPR in fulfilling its mission and its work, please use the QR code on the right. → →

