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Could psychedelic drug treatments help Ukraine veterans return to civilian life?

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6–7 Minuten

“When I woke up, I immediately felt the result,” said Olena Herasymyuk, a Ukrainian poet-turned-paramedic, after undergoing treatment with ketamine for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Herasymyuk, who for seven years had cared for and evacuated thousands of wounded soldiers, is one of a growing number of Ukrainians who have suffered with PTSD and are receiving innovative treatments that the country hopes will successfully confront the enormous mental health challenges it faces due to the war against Russia.

Ketamine-assisted therapy enabled Herasymyuk to cope with her accumulated trauma, following the failure of months of conventional PTSD treatment.

Since World War II, no other country has had as large a proportion of its population serve on the frontlines as Ukraine.

More than [1.3 million Ukrainians](#) — almost three percent of the population — already have veteran status, having fought in or supported the war near the front lines and witnessed the

gruesome consequences of protracted trench and drone warfare.

While veterans are expected to successfully reintegrate into civilian life, [10 to 25 percent](#) will likely struggle with PTSD and other serious mental health challenges.

[Research confirms](#) that a vast number of Ukrainians, including civilians, are facing a severe, ongoing mental health crisis.

[One study](#) estimates that 25 percent of the population may be suffering from symptoms of PTSD due to the ongoing war.

And to add to the crisis, nearly half of Ukraine's mental health facilities have reported damage from military action.

Europe should play an active role in helping Ukraine meet this challenge by funding innovative models of care, supporting research on psychedelic-assisted treatment, and ensuring Ukraine's inclusion in ongoing European studies.

The reality is, Ukraine's recovery is about more than just brick-and-mortar reconstruction: a healthy population is arguably the biggest key to a stable, thriving, and democratic Ukrainian state — and a reliable EU partner.

As it faces this crisis, Ukraine is investing in emerging PTSD treatments that have shown [significant promise](#) in Australia, Europe, Israel, and North America, but have not yet been adopted at scale anywhere.

Safe, clinical, settings

These treatments, provided in safe, clinical settings under the supervision of mental health professionals, integrate medications with psychedelic properties, such as ketamine and MDMA, into

therapy to help people with PTSD process their trauma.

They offer novel advantages over traditional methods that require long-term engagement, have high non-response rates, can cause significant side effects, and often only offer partial relief.

By contrast, psychedelic-assisted therapies enable deeper emotional processing of trauma, symptom relief, address the root causes of mental distress, and improved therapeutic engagement.

In a video testimonial, Herasymyuk described how the trauma she sustained affected her: “At some point you realise that...you, who has evacuated [injured soldiers] at an industrial scale, can no longer cope with your own head.”

When conventional treatments failed to work, her medical team at the government clinic, Lisova Polyana, proposed ketamine-assisted therapy.

Herasymyuk underwent three sessions, which she described as challenging — “not at all what we associate with these substances” — but that lifted the depression and suicidal thoughts that she experienced daily “from the first waking second.”

In her estimation, the therapy allowed her to process as much trauma in a few sessions as it did in a year of conventional treatment.

Hippy stigma

Although a growing body of research shows that [ketamine](#) and [psychedelic-assisted](#) treatment work for PTSD, historical and cultural stigma — especially the association with [recreational drug use](#) — as well as [regulatory and legal](#)

[restrictions](#) have impeded further research and widespread clinical adoption of these therapies in most countries.

State clinics are treating a growing number of patients with it and are exploring group therapy models in order to meet greater demand.

The Ukrainian government is also moving towards permitting experimental treatment with psychedelic substances that are currently banned, but have shown promising [results](#) elsewhere.

Legal opening

In March 2025, the Ukrainian ministry of health [proposed](#) changing the legal status of substances like psilocybin, LSD and MDMA to permit their use in medical research and proposed research regulations.

In August 2025, the government approved a new [national drug strategy](#) that sets the goal of developing and implementing “new methods for treating post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental disorders using narcotic drugs.”

The strategy also seeks to increase harm reduction and drug treatment services, which are essential for the reintegration of veterans given the prevalence of [drug use](#) among soldiers, and will align Ukrainian drug policy more broadly with European standards.

In 2024, Ukraine [legalised medical cannabis](#), which could be beneficial in treating PTSD.

If successful, Ukraine’s ambition to roll out these emerging PTSD treatments and modernise its drug policies will benefit tens of thousands of Ukrainians.

As Aleksander Kwaśniewski, the former president of Poland and a member of the [Global Commission on Drug Policy](#), has observed, “Ukraine offers an unprecedented opportunity to research progressive PTSD and mental health treatments and increase their evidence base. Breakthroughs made in Ukraine will greatly benefit Europe and, indeed, the world.”

As Europe’s interest in psychedelic-assisted therapies grows, the EU is well placed to support Ukraine with funding and technical expertise to expand its support for psychedelic treatments for war-related PTSD.