

# The Political Guide to *Ayahuasca* Policy Development for Legislators



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# Ayahuasca Canada Policy Development

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### ***What is Ayahuasca Spiritual Healing?***

Ayahuasca is an ancient Amazonian Spiritual Medicine that has been in continual use for the past 3,500 years (scientifically dated) and which historically dates into pre-history. It is used by over 160 distinct Amazonian cultures throughout the Amazon Basin and is increasingly used by Western initiates, including Canadians.

In South American Ayahuasca is widely viewed as having distinct societal benefits. Spiritual healing is used for treatment of:

- Alcoholism and Drug Addictions
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- Suicidal Ideation
- Treatment-Resistant Depression
- Childhood traumas, sexual abuse
- Spiritual and Religious Exploration

## **Government of Peru UNESCO Declaration About Ayahuasca**

In 2008 the Peruvian government issued a UNESCO declaration stating that:

*“Said plant (ayahuasca) is known to the indigenous Amazonian people as a **wise or teacher plant that teaches initiates the very foundations of the world and its components. The effects of its consumption constitute the entrance to the spiritual world and its secrets**, so that around the Ayahuasca ritual it is structured medicine.” ([link](#))*

## **How Ayahuasca is Used in Canada**

A number of Canadians have undergone apprenticeships with various Amazonian Indian cultures who welcome Western initiates and provide shamanic training. After learning to work with this medicine in the Amazon, facilitators will sometimes offer “underground” ceremonies in Canada to persons seeking out the medicine.

## **Spiritual Healing vs the Pharmaceutical Model**

Spiritual healing does not fit the western Pharmaceutical Model. **In an Ayahuasca ceremony, healing is accomplished through a “soul flight” or “soul journey”** in which the initiate travels to past traumas or to various “worlds” in the religious cosmology of ayahuasca for spiritual healing. Ayahuasca shamans or facilitators view modern emotional disorders as a spiritual sickness. Pharmaceutical models attempt to treat emotional illnesses as psychiatric disorders or as a chemical imbalance in the brain. While both modalities have merits, spiritual healing has been proven to address some treatment-resistant conditions including suicidal ideation and treatment-resistant depression among others.

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## **Ayahuasca – the Medicine of Last Resort**

Ayahuasca is one of the strongest psychotropic substances on planet earth. **As such it will never fit into the pharmaceutical model nor will it ever become a “mainstream” treatment.** An Ayahuasca ceremony is a personally challenging experience in which the initiate must be free of anti-depressant medications, among others and undertake a special diet prior to the ceremony. During the ceremony itself vomiting and diarrhea are not uncommon among first-time initiates and are indeed expected and even encouraged by the facilitator. In countries like Brazil where religious use of ayahuasca is not criminalized, it has never become mainstream medicine.

## **How Dangerous is an Ayahuasca Ceremony?**

The International Center for Ethnobotanical Education, Research, and Service (ICEERS) has special NGO consultative status with the United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). ICEERS is widely recognized as the world authority on Ayahuasca and other traditional shamanic medicines.

**ICEERS reports that the only contraindications for someone taking Ayahuasca is people who have high blood pressure or if they are suffering from psychosis (schizophrenia, hearing voices or having difficulties distinguishing reality).** An ICEERS three-year study into global Ayahuasca use studied 58 media-reported deaths attributed to Ayahuasca and found that no official autopsy has ever attributed any of these deaths to Ayahuasca. StatsCan has no deaths attributed to ayahuasca or its active ingredient Dimethyltryptamine (DMT).

In Ayahuasca cultures in South America, pregnant women will take ayahuasca to the eighth month of pregnancy, children from the age of five will be given age-appropriate doses.



## **Is Spiritual Healing Considered Religious?**

Shamanic **Ayahuasca ceremonies as practiced by most Amazonian cultures have a rich religious cosmology with spiritual worlds similar to those found in mainstream Judeo-Christian religious beliefs.** The Peruvian UNESCO Declaration states:

Part of this difference consists of the ritual that accompanies its consumption, which leads to diverse effects, **but always within a culturally delimited margin and with religious, therapeutic and culturally affirmative purposes.** The practice of Ayahuasca ritual sessions constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of the identity of the Amazonian peoples.

## **The Brazilian Solution**

For countries struggling to understand the issues around the use of this ancient medicine, Brazil offers perhaps the best example for resolution. In Brazil ayahuasca was illegal from the 1970's forward. Prior to that ayahuasca existed in a legal grey area in that country. **In the 1980's Brazil undertook a 20-year study into the issues surrounding ayahuasca use in that country.**

The study was an extensive exploration into the use of ayahuasca with some regulators even participating in ayahuasca ceremonies. At the end of the study Brazil declared ayahuasca use legal in traditional ceremonies in Brazil. An estimated 1,000 ayahuasca centers are now found in Brazil **including centers that cater to diverse religious groups including Buddhism, Catholicism, Christianity and Hinduism as well as the traditional shamanic cultures that have used ayahuasca for millennia.**



## **How Spiritual Healing is Actively Suppressed in Canada – the Section 56 “Religious Exemption” Program**

**The Health Canada Section 56 “Religious Exemption” program has actively suppressed the introduction of shamanic religious practices in Canada**, despite the overwhelming evidence for safe use and societal benefits as seen in Amazonian countries. While the Section 56 religious exemption program has allowed a handful of Christian-based ayahuasca centers such as Santo Daime and UDV to operate legally in the country, regulators have steadfastly refused to approve traditional (shamanic) ayahuasca use.

This failure is perhaps best seen in the experience of the Companionship of the Sacred Vine (CSV), the first and only shamanic ayahuasca church actually approved by s.56 in Canada. **Despite it being granted an exemption, the CSV was never able to import ayahuasca due to the on-going refusal of Health Canada to add a legal Peruvian ayahuasca exporter to the exemption**, a routine matter. You can download the [background paper](#) that explains how that happened.

Even though the CSV was never able to import or serve ayahuasca in Canada, Health Canada eventually decided to revoke that organization's Section 56 exemption. The CSV has filed for a judicial review of that decision (pending.)

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## ***AyahuascaCanada Recommended Policy Changes and Request for Consultation***

AyahuascaCanada is recommending policy changes that would result in a cessation of arrests for possession or importation of ayahuasca into Canada and that legitimate ayahuasca groups such as the CSV and others be allowed to open centers in the country without interference from Health Canada or other regulatory agencies. Further, that these ayahuasca churches be allowed to legally import ayahuasca into Canada.

***Ayahuasca Canada is asking for a consultation process to implement Canadian policy changes at the federal level.***



## Evidence-Based Rationale for Legitimate Use of Ayahuasca in Canada

### *From the Amazonian Jungle to the World*

In the Quechua language of the north Andes, ayahuasca is the ‘vine of the soul’ or ‘vine of the dead’ and is consumed as a psychotropic beverage in both indigenous and non-indigenous ceremonies.

Within its original indigenous context, **ayahuasca is traditionally consumed across the upper reaches of the Amazon river system (that is, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) by over 160 indigenous ayahuasca cultures.**

**It is considered a spiritual medicine by healers throughout South America and around the world.**

Ayahuasca is a liquid produced by cooking the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine (vine of the dead) and the *Psychotria viridis* shrub, (Chacruna) which contains trace amounts of Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) (Schultes & Hofmann, 1992).

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Ayahuasca is used as a spiritual medicine in ceremonies officiated by Amazonian Indians, mestizos, and diverse NeoShamanic (New World) shamans who have learned to use it in its places of traditional origin (Labate et al., 2009; Labate & Jungaberle, 2011; Luna, 2011; Labate & Bouso, 2013).

***While originating in the Amazon, ayahuasca is now used worldwide in underground or illegal ceremonies, in “grey-area” or in completely legal ceremonies depending on the specific laws of the country.*** There are also a number of established world-wide ayahuasca churches mostly originating in Brazil.

## A 3,500 Year History

The oldest traces of ayahuasca have been found in the Azapa desert in the north of Chile, where residues of harmine have been found in hair analyzed from mummies dated between 500 and 1000 BC. ([link – Page 2](#)) The ayahuasca vine does not grow in the Azapa valley nor does any other harmine-containing plant which indicates commerce between the ancient populations of Chile and the Amazonian peoples.

National Geographic has also verified the use of ayahuasca to at least 1,000 years. ([link](#)).

While these are chemical analyses, ***it is generally accepted that the use of Ayahuasca predates recorded history.***

Shipibo Amazonian shamans have stated that ayahuasca was introduced to their ancestors by the Incas, an ancient South American people.

## Shaman-Chiefs Guided Tribes

Historically, the chief of Amazonian Indian tribes was a shaman-chief who had mastered the use of ayahuasca. The shaman-chief would guide the tribe based on visions from communal ayahuasca ceremonies. Ayahuasca would also be used as a teaching plant to help people identify healing plants and for hunters to understand the jungle environment and the habits of animals.

For one of the best resources on indigenous ayahuasca use from the early 1900s, see *The Wizard of the Upper Amazon* by F. Bruce Lamb ([link](#))



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## **Ayahuasca is Legal in Amazonian Countries**

Brazil, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia recognize ayahuasca's indigenous cultural heritage and do not prosecute ceremonies.

After a 20-year investigation, in 2010 Brazil formally approved ayahuasca for religious and ritual use. Prior to 2010, ayahuasca had been in a legal grey area.

This was the culmination of a 20-year investigation involving state agencies and numerous formal committees. ***The investigation found that the use of ayahuasca was not associated with social disruption and even found that those using ayahuasca were healthier and more productive than average citizens.***

As part of the investigation, ***some CONFEN (Brazilian Drug Agency) members actually participated in ayahuasca ceremonies*** and their personal experiences reinforced the findings that ayahuasca was doing far more good than harm in Brazilian society. ([link](#))

In Ecuador, Ayahuasca is used legally for traditional ceremonies. In Colombia there are no laws against using ayahuasca. In Columbia "Yuruparí," an ayahuasca ritual, is recognized as intangible heritage.

Further north in Central America, Costa Rica does not regulate ayahuasca. Numerous ayahuasca retreats operate there, including Rythmia, one of the most high-end ayahuasca retreats in the world. Numerous Hollywood celebrities have attended ceremonies there. ([link](#))



## Peru Declares Ayahuasca Cultural Patrimony

In 2008 the Peruvian Directorate of the National Institute of Culture declared the knowledge and traditional uses of Ayahuasca practiced by the native Amazon communities as Cultural Patrimony of the Nation (Resolution Number 836/INC), based on the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Peru states that the use of Banisteriopsis caapi and Chacruna-Psychotria plants (the traditional ayahuasca brew) structured around the ayahuasca ritual have ***“an extraordinary cultural history” with “religious, therapeutic and culturally affirmative” properties and is “one of the fundamental pillars of the identity of Amazonian peoples:”***

***“Said plant (ayahuasca) is known to the indigenous Amazonian people as a wise or teacher plant that teaches initiates the very foundations of the world and its components. The effects of its consumption constitute the entrance to the spiritual world and its secrets, so that around the Ayahuasca ritual it is structured medicine.”***

The institute, which is charged with documenting and protecting Peruvian cultural heritage, described ayahuasca as “a wise or teaching plant, which shows to initiates the very foundations of the world and its components.”

It also stated that, when used in a traditional ritual, it:

***“leads to a variety of effects which are always within culturally defined limits, **and with** religious, therapeutic, and culturally affirmative intentions.”*** ([link](#))





## ***Christianity and other Mainstream Religions Endorse Entheogens***

Ayahuasca and other entheogens provide a sacred or mystical experience that strengthens religious faith, according to mainstream religious scholars. ***In Canada, Fr. Geoffrey Ready at the University of Toronto, School of Theology, teaches an Orthodox Christian seminary course - Mystical Traditions and the Sacred Journey of Transformation: Narrative, Ritual, and Entheogens.*** From the course description:

*As we examine the rich history of Christian mystical experience and parallels within other ancient spiritual traditions, we will recognize the special role of entheogens, or sacred fungus and plant medicines, alongside other practices, in facilitating or deepening transcendent experience. We will examine the potential role of entheogens in mystical encounters today, mindful of both ethical considerations and diverse perspectives on their usage. ([link](#))*

In Brazil people can attend Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, African-based, Shamanic and other similarly-themed religious ayahuasca centers. All co-exist quite peacefully and there are an estimated 1,000 ayahuasca centers in Brazil.

### ***Other Religious Use of Entheogens ([links](#)):***

Ligare: A Christian Psychedelic Society ([link](#)). Shefa – Jewish Psychedelic Society ([link](#)). Entheogens and the Ancient Mystery Religions ([link](#)) Enthomedia: Entheogens and human spirituality: ([link](#)).

## **What is a Religion?**

Conventional Definitions of Religion include:

- The belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, a personal God or gods
- A particular system of faith and worship
- A pursuit or interest to which someone ascribes supreme importance

A comprehensive definition of religion – The personal and individualized embrace of knowledge and effort directed toward understanding and successfully navigating reality.

This comprehensive definition of religion leads us to a search for answer to life's questions including:

- What is the origin of the Universe and Life?
- What is the history of our planet and human civilization?
- What is the Destiny of humanity?
- Who/what is God?
- What is our relationship to the Divine?
- What happens when we die?
- Is Earth humanity alone in the Universe?

Conventional science, established religions (for the most part) and philosophy do not adequately address these questions. ***It is this exploration where ayahuasca helps us to understand the fundamental (religious) answers to life's questions.***

And this is not abstract thought experiments, doctrines or dogma. It is an experiential exploration in which we are directly shown and knowledge is directly conveyed to the initiate through the “soul flight” or “soul journey.” As the Peruvian government UNESCO declaration states -

*Said plant (ayahuasca) is known to the indigenous Amazonian people as a wise or teacher plant that teaches initiates the very foundations of the world and its components. ***The effects of its consumption constitute the entrance to the spiritual world and its secrets,****

As such, ayahuasca allows the initiate to directly experience God's creations outside of the earthly realm and normal waking consciousness and to understand man's place in the infinite cosmos.



## ***Brazilian Regulatory Experience***

Brazil offers a great example for any country grappling with how to regulate ancestral medicines such as ayahuasca. ***After 20 years of studies, commissions and committees, with some regulators actually participating in ceremonies, in 2010 the Brazilian government decriminalized ancestral plant medicines for religious use.*** ([link](#)).

Based on the most reliable estimates, there are over 1,000 ayahuasca centers in Brazil, including centers affiliated with major religions, ayahuasca churches, indigenous communities, and independent groups.

What Brazil found was:

- Society didn't fall apart
- There is no violence or gang activities associated with ancestral medicines (as also confirmed in Health Canada documents)
- Ancestral medicines have never become mainstream
- Pharmaceutical Industry profits have not been affected

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- Spiritual healing can easily co-exist with the Pharmaceutical model
- Ayahuasca churches are a net benefit to society

In Brazil people can attend Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, African-based, Shamanic and other similarly-themed ayahuasca centers. All co-exist quite peacefully.

## ***Spiritual Healing vs. Pharmaceutical Medicines – The Soul Flight***

An ayahuasca ceremony is centered around the concept of what the experts call the “soul flight” or “soul journey.” ***In a soul journey, the initiate travels to other dimensions, to past traumas or to heavenly realms to directly experience the various worlds found in God’s creations.***

The ayahuasca spiritual approach to mental/emotional/spiritual healing is distinctly different than pharmaceutical medicines. The Pharmaceutical model assumes any problems are related to physicality while ayahuasca shamanism assumes problems are spiritual in origin.

Pharmaceutical medicines attempt to establish a protocol that will work for a broad population base ***while shamanic healing maintains that individual human spirituality is the key pathway to emotional healing.***

And while the pharmaceutical model uses a standard approach, shamans work with an individual’s spiritual journey through soul flights. This concept recognizes that true healing is brought about when the participant(s) directly experience their own spiritual nature.



## Ayahuasca – Not a Pharmaceutical Drug

Ayahuasca cannot be distilled into a “medicine” in the Western pharmaceutical concept. The entire objective of an ayahuasca ceremony is to produce a soul flight or soul journey, a sacred experience.

**Entire religions have been inspired through the use of ayahuasca. Two Brazilian ayahuasca religions – Santo Daime and the UDV have spread around the world.** Over 160 distinct ayahuasca cultures in the Amazon basin have their own rich religious cosmologies.

The idea of patenting ayahuasca for clinical use is diametrically opposed to the ceremonial use of this ancient medicine. A doctor mediates a pharmaceutical or chemical condition in his patients. **An ayahuasca shaman or facilitator mediates an initiate’s soul flight into spiritual dimensions.** Unless your doctor is versed in soul flights or soul journeys, he is not equipped to travel into spiritual dimensions to guide your healing process in those dimensions.

While western studies have documented ayahuasca’s healing powers, any healing done in a ceremony is produced through the spiritual experience. **Ayahuasca will never be a medicine in the context of the pharmaceutical model unless medical doctors undergo a shamanic apprenticeship.**





## ***Spiritual Healing – Examples***

An ayahuasca ceremony is a “guided” ceremony where the facilitator is in direct contact with Mother Ayahuasca. The facilitator oversees the initiate’s soul flight:

**Example 1** – A facilitator was working with a group of seven Canadian Special Forces veterans who had been referred to him (not officially) by a Canadian Forces Psychologist. All were suffering from suicidal ideation. During the ceremony, the facilitator saw the souls of all of the people who had been killed by these soldiers and they were all present in the ceremony. ***He saw the spirits of the deceased enemy soldiers telling each of these men to kill themselves.*** In order to conduct the healing, the facilitator had to clear the influence of these spirits on the veterans, which he proceeded to do. Since this ceremony, all seven of the veterans have recovered from their suicidal thoughts and have never acted on them.

**Example 2** – A person suffering from dissociative disorder had a traumatic relationship with his alcoholic father, who had slowly drank himself to death during this young man’s formative years.

When he was seventeen, he was the last person to see his father alive as he lay dying from alcoholic jaundice in the hospital.

***During the ayahuasca ceremony, this now adult person traveled back to the hospital room scene in his spiritual body.*** In spirit, this man was observed his younger self watching in horror as his father lay dying. He saw a nurse come and usher his younger self out of the room and felt not only the trauma of his teenage self but the concern of the nurse.

Finally, as he was perched above his dying father in spirit, ***he felt the pain his father experienced during his life, his suffering as he lay dying and he urged his father to let go of the earthly realm*** and move into spirit. After this experience, the man let go of the anger and resentment towards his father that had plagued him throughout his life.

**Example 3** – A severely alcoholic man had been coerced by his brother into attending an ayahuasca ceremony in a remote location in BC. As he was in a remote location with nothing better to do and without access to alcohol this man decided to attend the ceremony, although he swore there would be no affect. ***During the ceremony ayahuasca took him on a journey through his body and showed him the damage the alcohol and drugs were doing to his body.***

She showed him his liver and told him it had 10% function and if he kept damaging it, he would soon die. The man fought the medicine during the ceremony and immediately after the ceremony he swore he would never touch ayahuasca again. ***However at a follow-up ceremony the next night, the man did attend the ceremony and has never touched alcohol or drugs since.*** This man continued working with the medicine and went on to become a very powerful Canadian ayahuasca facilitator.

## **Early 1900s - Ayahuasca Churches Established**

In the early 1900's the use of ayahuasca spread from traditional Indigenous Amazonian shamans to structured ayahuasca churches. Santo Daime ([link](#)), the União do Vegetal or UDV ([link](#)) and Barquinha are three of the main ayahuasca churches founded in Brazil and have now spread worldwide. For an overview see this page. ([link](#))

***All of these ayahuasca churches attempt to improve the human condition.*** For example, UDV "works for the evolution of the human being in the sense of his or her spiritual development." Santo Daime promotes a lifestyle in conformity with "Harmony, Love, Truth and Justice as well as key doctrinal values such as strength, humility, kinship, and purity of heart."

## **Medical Studies**

With the reported therapeutic effects of ayahuasca in traditional spiritual ceremonies, the use of ayahuasca has gained the attention of western ethnobotanists, doctors, pharmacologists, clinicians and researchers.

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**Over the last four decades hundreds of scientific and medical studies have been conducted into ritual ayahuasca ceremonies and its effects on PTSD, addictions, suicidal ideation, treatment-resistant depression, childhood traumas and other serious spiritual/emotional issues.**

Long-term large-scale studies of regular ayahuasca users indicate the positive effects of ayahuasca spiritual healing for individuals and society. See – [Appendix](#) - Ayahuasca Studies

## **Ayahuasca is not a “Recreational” Experience**

An ayahuasca ceremony can induce vomiting (la purga) and/or diarrhea. People who wish to undertake a ceremony must also prepare themselves physically and mentally with a special diet before and after ceremonies.

**During a ceremony participants can be confronted with their deepest traumas or have to face their deepest fears – often referred to as “shadow work.”**

After the ceremony the knowledge or revelations gained in the ceremony must be incorporated into a person’s life. This “integration” or ceremony follow-up can be another challenging experience and participants may require help from experienced people.

While the ceremony itself is over in hours, the integration process can potentially take several days or even weeks. It is important for people conducting ceremonies to provide an after-care program. (31)



## **Ayahuasca - the Spiritual Medicine of Last Resort**

Most people seeking ayahuasca do so as a last resort when standard pharmaceutical interventions have failed. This is borne out in a large cross-sectional study of over 11,000 ayahuasca users where therapeutic motivation was the primary reason given for attending an ayahuasca ceremony:

**Drinkers of Ayahuasca in naturalistic settings perceived remarkable benefits for their affective symptoms in this survey assessment. There is no obvious evidence of negative mental health effects being associated with long-term consumption.**

*Of participants reporting depression (n = 1571) or anxiety (n = 1125) at the time of consuming Ayahuasca, 78% reported that their depression was either ‘very much’ improved (46%), or ‘completely resolved’ (32%); while 70% of those with anxiety reported that their symptoms were ‘very much’ improved (54%), or ‘completely resolved’ (16%).*

The Global Ayahuasca Project ([link](#))

## **Long-term Societal Benefits**

What people are confronted with in an ayahuasca ceremony is often very deep-seated traumas or behaviors that have come about from traumatic childhood events. In shamanic terms this would be seen as “inherited” or familial problems which must be addressed for wholistic spiritual healing in order for the person to reclaim their place in their family lineage and community.

**It is well-recognized in Amazonian countries that ayahuasca is beneficial for society. These benefits are also indicated in large-scale studies.** The data suggest that the study participants have high levels of general, mental, and positive health, and show excellent levels of adjustment and coping strategies, in addition to healthy lifestyles. ([link](#))

## **Ayahuasca is not a Threat to Pharmaceutical Industry Profits**

Ayahuasca will never become “mainstream” medicine. Even in countries where ayahuasca is legal pharmaceutical industry profits have never been affected by ayahuasca ceremonies.

The projected revenue of South American pharmaceutical markets (most of which are in the Amazon Basin) is estimated to reach US \$33.85 billion in 2025. South American revenues are anticipated to exhibit an annual growth rate of 4.88%, as estimated by CAGR from 2025 to 2030. ([link](#))

**Brazil decriminalized ayahuasca in 2010 and is the only South American country ranked among the top pharmaceutical markets in the world,** with a global share of approximately two percent and pharmaceutical revenues of more than \$20 billion U.S. dollars.

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The Brazilian market has one of the fastest growth rates among leading pharmaceutical markets in the world, with an estimated nine percent increase in 2023 and a pharmaceutical industry that has been increasingly growing in recent years. ([Link](#))



## Safety and Legality

### ***Ayahuasca – Physically No More Dangerous than a Cup of Coffee***

The International Center for Ethnobotanical Education, Research, and Service (ICEERS) is a United Nations sanctioned NGO with UN Special Consultative Status. ICEERS studies and makes recommendations on the use of entheogens including ayahuasca.

From ICEERS Safety Fact Sheet:

***Studies in both animals and healthy humans have shown that ayahuasca is a physically and psychologically safe substance*** when its composition is known, and when it is administered in controlled doses in appropriate environments with the necessary support. ([link](#))

Ayahuasca (and Coffee) slightly raise blood pressure -

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*In medical terms, ayahuasca has few contraindications. **Only if you have a serious cardiovascular disorder should you not take ayahuasca, as it slightly increases blood pressure.** No alterations of liver function and other biochemical parameters have been observed after the administration of ayahuasca in the laboratory. Only a modulation of the immune system has been detected, but this is temporary and does not seem to have clear effects on health. ([link](#))*

Coffee (caffeine) also raises blood pressure ([link](#))

## **Who Shouldn't Take Ayahuasca – Psychosis Pre-Screening**

**People suffering from a reality break (psychosis) such as schizophrenia or people who are hearing voices or having problems functioning in normal social situations should not take ayahuasca.**

Psychotic symptoms may include hallucinations, delusions, hearing voices, disordered or incoherent speech or behavior that is inappropriate for a given situation. A psychosis results in difficulties determining what is real and what is not real.

CSV screening programs for participants include mental health questionnaires and pre-ceremony interview(s) to determine if ayahuasca use is right for an individual. As well, an ayahuasca decision-making guide is available on the CSV website ([link](#)).

## **Drug Interactions – SSRIs and Others**

Ayahuasca should not be taken by anyone on SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) anti-depressants due to the potential risk of serotonin syndrome. **It is recommended to wait at least six to eight weeks after stopping SSRIs before taking ayahuasca to ensure safety.** And while this interaction is theoretical, precautionary measures are in place at the CSV for anyone contemplating taking ayahuasca.

As well, the CSV recommends and makes use of **the ICEERS El Faro Support Center program which answers questions about possible interactions between psychoactive plants and medical treatments or medications** ([link](#)). This service provides an opinion as to potential problems for specific medications and results are available in a week.

## **DMT – the Active Ingredient**

N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) found in trace amounts in the ayahuasca brew, is an endogenous psychedelic substance, meaning it is naturally produced in the human brain. Research shows DMT manufactured by the human body plays a role in the nervous system and influences dream states.

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DMT synthesis is thought to occur in the pineal gland. Some theories suggest DMT levels may rise during sleep to induce the dream state. DMT may also be related to other natural changes in awareness, including near-death experiences.



## **StatsCan DMT Reported Deaths in Canada - (There Aren't Any)**

**The fatal dose of DMT has been estimated at 8,800 mg for a person weighing 80 kg. The average dose of DMT in tested ayahuasca brews has been measured at 60 mg. ([link](#))**

A search of the StatsCan database ([link](#)) failed to turn up any DMT-attributed deaths in Canada.

## **Legality – is it DMT or Ayahuasca?**

Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) can be found in trace amounts in the ayahuasca brew. The United Nations outlawed synthetic (extracted) DMT in their 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances. However, they made a distinction between plant-based DMT, such as ayahuasca and synthetic or extracted DMT.

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As such, ayahuasca is not categorized as DMT by the UN and has not been banned. This is also acknowledged by Health Canada in their official policies and procedures for religious exemptions ([Error: Reference source not found](#)). From the United Nations International Narcotics Control Board (UNINCB) 2010 Annual Report (Page 46, Paragraphs 284 & 285)

.....no plants are currently controlled under that (1971) Convention or under the 1988 Convention. **Preparations (e.g. decoctions for oral use) made from plants containing those active ingredients are also not under international control.**

**Examples of such plants or plant material include..... ayahuasca, a preparation made from plants indigenous to the Amazon basin of South America.**

Paragraphs 284 and 285 ([link](#))

## **DMT is Not a “Drug of Concern” in Canada**

**DMT is not listed as a drug of concern in the Canadian Drugs and Substances strategy.** ([link](#))

The Government of Canada Drug Analysis Service (DAS) has also not listed DMT under their list of *Main Controlled Substances* in Canada. ([link](#))

However, the Canadian government does have a major concern with opioids such as heroin or pharmaceutical opioids including morphine, oxycodone and fentanyl in Canada ([link](#)). **It is interesting to note that many people who attend ayahuasca ceremonies to treat addictions will often give up their drug of choice after a single ayahuasca ceremony** and numerous addiction studies bear this out ([link](#)).

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## **No Danger to the Canadian Public – Health Canada**

There is no recreational or black market for ayahuasca according to Health Canada's official Policies and Procedures for religious exemptions for ayahuasca, **obtained by AyahuascaCanada through the Access to Information (Freedom of Information) Act - Health Canada File Number - A-2022-001575 /MC2. The document states:**

- There is no evidence of risk to public safety associated with Daime tea/Ayahuasca, in terms of illicit production and trafficking, even in countries where it has been used for centuries.
- There is no evidence of widespread use and diversion in Canada
- Daime tea/Ayahuasca specifically does not appear to be the object of common abuse.
- Physical dependence and tolerance to Daime tea/Ayahuasca do not appear to develop.
- Consumption of Daime tea/Ayahuasca induces vomiting, which limits the amount that can be ingested at one time and thus its abuse potential.

To request a copy of this ATI file ([link](#)).

## **US Initiates High-Profile Arrests in Canada**

Two very high-profile arrests for ayahuasca have taken place in Canada recently. Chad Gillies was arrested by a Calgary SWAT team ([link](#)) and Michael Azdich was arrested by the RCMP in Nova Scotia ([link](#)).

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Mr. Gillies had received a package sent by a shaman friend and was unaware of the contents and Mr. Azdich had been conducting a women's healing circle when RCMP raided his property to make the arrest.

**Both arrests involved months-long, multi-agency undercover investigations and both were initiated by United States authorities.** The multi-agency task force included the United States Border Services, US Homeland Security, Canadian Border Services, the RCMP (uniformed and undercover) and in the case of Mr. Gillies also included Calgary Police Services (CPS) undercover and SWAT teams.

In order to make these arrests, US Homeland Security obtained confiscated shipments of ayahuasca from the United States Border Services (Customs), physically drove the shipment from Miami to the Canadian border, obtained a section 56 exemption from Health Canada to import the substance into Canada (with the assistance of the RCMP) and then physically handed it off to the investigating police force to maintain chain of custody of the evidence.

## **RCMP - 32 Arrests for DMT in Five Years, Two for Ayahuasca**

AyahuascaCanada obtained the five-year RCMP arrest records for all DMT offences (synthetic and ayahuasca). **This was done through an Access to Information (ATI) request, otherwise known as a Freedom of Information request.**

The ATI document indicated 32 arrests in Canada in the past five years for all DMT offences, of which it appears that two arrests were made specifically for ayahuasca. ATI File Number – A-2024-08989 Request a copy of the file ([link](#))

## **The RCMP Have no Arrest Protocols for Ayahuasca**

AyahuascaCanada also filed an ATI (Freedom of Information) request to obtain the RCMP written Policies and Procedures, arrest protocols or written instructions to officers regarding enforcement of ayahuasca regulations in Canada. There aren't any. Obtain a copy of the ATI - A-2023-12379 ([link](#))

## **No Previous DMT Arrests in Calgary**

**DMT isn't a policing priority in Calgary and the Calgary Police Service (CPS) made no arrests for DMT (synthetic or ayahuasca) in the year prior to Mr. Gillie's recent SWAT arrest ([link](#)),** according to Rebecca Davidson, the CPS analytics manager.

Following Mr. Gillies' arrest, AC asked Davidson for "the number of arrests and seizures of DMT in Calgary in the past year; perceived public threat and policing priorities regarding DMT and statistics related to arrests, abuse and seizures of DMT in Calgary" over the past year.

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The very succinct answer from Ms. Davidson - “Thank you for your research request. I have checked with our Drug Unit and we do not have data that would inform your research.”

Obtain a copy of the official email ([link](#))

## ***Are Mainstream Media Reported Deaths Accurate?***

In 2023 ICEERS published the results of a three-year study entitled Ayahuasca Global Consumption and Reported Deaths in the Media. As part of the study they examined media-reported deaths attributed to ayahuasca. A conclusion of the study:

***To date worldwide, no forensic examination or toxicological analysis has determined the combination of Banisteriopsis caapi and Psychotria viridis or Diplopterys cabrerana (the traditional ayahuasca brew) has caused poisoning leading to death. ([link](#))***

## ***Ayahuasca Enhances Neuroplasticity***

Ayahuasca has been shown to promote neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections. A study by Morales-García et al. (2017) demonstrated that ayahuasca's components stimulate the growth of new neurons and synapses. ***This neuroplasticity can lead to long-term cognitive and emotional benefits, enhancing the brain's resilience to stress and mental health disorders. ([link](#))***



## ***Children and Pregnant Women Take Ayahuasca***

There are over 160 distinct ayahuasca cultures in the Amazon basin where the use of ayahuasca is part of the cultural heritage ([link](#)). In these cultures, such as Quechua, Achuar, Baniwa, Shipibo, Conibo, Huachipaeri, etc. etc. ***expectant mothers will often take ayahuasca up to the eighth month of pregnancy and children as young as five years old will be given age-appropriate doses of ayahuasca in ceremonies.***

When a girl is born in many of these cultures, a drop of ayahuasca is often placed in their eyes to help them “see” their artisan visions when they are sewing ayahuasca-inspired tapestries as an adult.

## ***CSV Facilitator Accreditation, Lifetime Care and Integration Programs***

***Any shaman or facilitator serving ayahuasca at a Companionship of the Sacred Vine (CSV) ceremony must go through a formal accreditation program before being allowed to serve ayahuasca.***  
This is in place to ensure that shamans or facilitators are known and operating within standard ceremony guidelines. These guidelines are in agreement with ICEERS and other professional operating standards ([link](#))

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One of the most important considerations in the ayahuasca ceremonial process is the after-care program, something known as “integration.” An ayahuasca ceremony can result in profound spiritual experiences or personal revelations. ***It is essential that there are experienced people available to act as an after-care resource if required.*** The CSV has a policy of “lifetime care” where people can access the CSV no-cost integration program at any time post-ceremony.

The Reverend Richard Brandl, a certified ayahuasca integration coach heads up the CSV integration program.

As well, the concept of the Padrino and Madrina programs are part of the CSV care program for participants. "Padrino" (Godfather) and "Madrina" (Godmother) refer to spiritual helpers or guides who have a deep understanding of ayahuasca ceremonies who are available to support participants before and after their ayahuasca ceremonies.

The other important CSV support function is the Guardian Program. ***These are experienced people, typically volunteers, who assist the shaman or facilitator during the ayahuasca ceremony itself.*** They play a crucial role in the ceremony, ensuring safety and rendering assistance to participants if required.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***Benefits of Spiritual Healing***

Far from being a danger to the Canadian public, ayahuasca is of net benefit to Canadian society. There are cost-savings to the Canadian health care system associated with ayahuasca spiritual healing.

***Numerous studies point out that ayahuasca users are more family and community oriented and are better adjusted within society both mentally and physically*** ([link](#)).

According to Health Canada documents ayahuasca poses no danger to the Canadian public and there is no diversion of ayahuasca into black markets ([Error: Reference source not found](#)). Ayahuasca is recognized as having an excellent safety profile that far exceeds legal and illegal substances available in Canada.

The RCMP have no arrest protocols for ayahuasca. ***The two most recent arrests for ayahuasca in Canada were initiated by US authorities, not Canadian.***

## **Summary Points**

- Ayahuasca is inherently safe
- Spiritual Healing provides numerous societal benefits
- An ayahuasca ceremony is not a “recreational” experience
- There is no societal danger posed by ayahuasca ceremonies
- There are no enforcement problems associated with the use of ayahuasca
- All CSV members must pass a physical and mental health checklist and a pre-ceremony interview for suitability
- Screening for ayahuasca/medications contradictions for applicants is part of the CSV safety program
- The CSV maintains a lifetime pre and post-ceremony support programs for all of our members

## **Two Policy Changes Required**

The first policy change is to immediately stop prosecuting people for the non-crime of religious ayahuasca use. The 2<sup>nd</sup> policy change would be to allow religious use of ayahuasca in Canada to legitimate ayahuasca churches, including shamanic churches.

## **Revamp the Dysfunctional s.56 Religious Exemption Program**

To any neutral observer, it should be patently obvious that the s.56 program is not operating as it was intended by Parliament.

The s.56 religious exemption program consists of civil servants ostensibly hired to assist Canadians to exercise their religious rights. **However, the truth is they actively suppress the religious freedoms of non-Christian ayahuasca churches.**

S.56 is *prima facie* discriminatory, providing prompt service standards for pharmaceutical (industrial) applicants while **putting religious applications “under review” without decisions for years, contrary to Canadian and world democratic principles.**

Given the history and on-going actions of this federal government program, the s.56 religious exemption program should be immediately dismantled.

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## ***The Ideal Solution - the Brazilian Model***

***The conclusion of Brazil's 20-year regulatory review concluded that there was no need for state intervention in what are religious matters.***

Since 2010, Brazil's de-regulation of religious ayahuasca ceremonies has provided a functional model and legalization has caused no societal problems. In fact, decriminalization has been of net benefit to Brazilian society.

## ***For Detailed Recommendations, We Should Talk***

***The CSV and AyahuascaCanada are the experts on NeoShamanic (New World) ayahuasca ceremonies in Canada. We are available for consultation on policy changes and recommendations - please do not hesitate to reach out to the representatives named below.***



# Ayahuasca Canada Policy Development

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## APPENDIX - Ayahuasca Studies

### ***The CSV Does Not Endorse Ayahuasca as a “Pharmaceutical Therapy”***

The CSV maintains that ayahuasca cannot be separated from the sacred traditional ceremony. And while scientific or medical studies (below) point to the therapeutic effect of ayahuasca, ***the CSV maintains that the traditional spiritual ceremony, the “soul flight” is the mechanism.*** Until medical doctors become experts on the soul flight or soul journey, ayahuasca will never become a pharmaceutical therapy.

The CSV does not offer ayahuasca in a clinical setting and provides spiritual ceremonies based on traditional Shipibo-Conibo ceremonies.

Please note - ***This is a small sample of the large volume of ayahuasca studies that have been published in English in various government, medical and pharmacological journals. Non-English studies dating back over four decades can also be found in institutions such as the University of Madrid in Spain and in South American medical and pharmacological journals.***

Much of the initial interest from western researchers, pharmacologists, ethnobotanists and clinicians started with healing information generated by Ayahuasca churches.

## **1. Takiwasi - Center for the Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts and Research on Traditional Medicines**

See – (TW [link](#))

From their website:

The Takiwasi Center is a therapeutic community legally recognized by the Ministry of Health of Peru. Our world-class, low-cost and efficient therapeutic protocol allows us to address drug addiction and mental health disorders with great results.

One of the original evidence-based South American ayahuasca mental health centers is Takiwasi located in Tarapoto, Peru which has over 30 years of practical and clinical experience. Their focus is on Drug Addiction Rehabilitation and Traditional Medicine.

From their website -

Takiwasi is considered the oldest institution to combine the use of psychotherapy and medicinal plants for the treatment of mental health. With over three decades of experience in this field, our model, in perfect balance between medicine, psychology and spirituality, has been the subject of study in more than 60 international research projects, articulating an interdisciplinary academic community made up of scientific institutions of world excellence.

### **Results**

Over 30 years of clinical experience indicate that the interaction between traditional Amazonian medicine, psychotherapy and spirituality, proposed by the therapeutic model of the Takiwasi Center, turns out to be very successful in the treatment of addictions and other mental health disorders. We believe that the articulation of these different therapeutic approaches greatly benefits the outcome of the treatment and thus is showing a path to follow in the global search for mental well-being and good living.

It is the initial vocation of the Takiwasi Center to associate clinical practice with research as it appears in its full name: Center for the Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts and Research on Traditional Medicines. Since the beginning of its operation, the Takiwasi Center has permanently evaluated its activities, its patient population and the results of its therapeutic interventions (Giove 1996, 2002; Mabit, 2007; Mabit & González, 2013) in order to constantly improve its model. A study published by Dr. Rosa Giove in 2002 shows that in a group of 100 former patients contacted two years after leaving the Center, the recovery rate is 54%, reaching 67% considering only those patients who completed the treatment receiving therapeutic discharge.

### ***2. The Therapeutic Potentials of Ayahuasca: Possible Effects against Various Diseases of Civilization***

(National Library of Medicine [link](#))

As a sacrament, ayahuasca is still a central element of many healing ceremonies in the Amazon Basin and its ritual consumption has become common among the mestizo populations of South America. Ayahuasca use amongst the indigenous people of the Amazon is a form of traditional medicine and cultural psychiatry.

During the last two decades, the substance has become increasingly known among both scientists and laymen, and currently its use is spreading all over in the Western world. In the present paper we describe the chief characteristics of ayahuasca, discuss important questions raised about its use, and provide an overview of the scientific research supporting its potential therapeutic benefits.

A growing number of studies indicate that the psychotherapeutic potential of ayahuasca is based mostly on the strong serotonergic effects, whereas the sigma-1 receptor (Sig-1R) agonist effect of its active ingredient dimethyltryptamine raises the possibility that the ethnomedical observations on the diversity of treated conditions can be scientifically verified. Moreover, in the right therapeutic or ritual setting with proper preparation and mindset of the user, followed by subsequent integration of the experience, ayahuasca has proven effective in the treatment of substance dependence.

This article has two important take-home messages: (1) the therapeutic effects of ayahuasca are best understood from a bio-psycho-socio-spiritual model, and (2) on the biological level ayahuasca may act against chronic low-grade inflammation and oxidative stress via the Sig-1R which can explain its widespread therapeutic indications.

### ***3. Research on Traditional Indigenous Medicine within an intercultural medicine model***

(Nierika A.C. [link](#))

The Nierika Institute of Intercultural Medicine promotes scientific research on the therapeutic potential of the ceremonial use of sacred plants in therapeutic contexts and their interdisciplinary and intercultural integration in public health. The institute brings together researchers in psychology, medical anthropology, ethno-psychiatry and pharmacology, to collaborate in developing a multidisciplinary and intercultural scientific approach to the study of sacred plants.

Recent studies conducted in other countries indicate that participation in indigenous peyote and ayahuasca ceremonies can have clinically positive effects on different mental conditions in patients receiving treatment with these plants. The integration of ayahuasca rituals in different psychotherapeutic treatment models has proven to be effective for patients with substance dependence

problems, depression, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress and complicated grief, among other conditions.

Currently, the Nierika cultural institute collaborates in the ATOP project (Ayahuasca Treatment Outcomes Project), an international research project that evaluates the effectiveness of Ayahuasca in the treatment of addictions, depression and anxiety; AC is also collaborating on an international study evaluating the effects of ceremonial use of Ayahuasca in the treatment of eating disorders with Laurentian University, and the University of British Columbia, as well as UNAM

#### ***4. Ayahuasca and Public Health: Health Status, Psychosocial Well-Being, Lifestyle, and Coping Strategies in a Large Sample of Ritual Ayahuasca Users***

PubMed ([link](#))

This study involved a sample of long-term ritualistic ayahuasca users in Spain. To our knowledge, this is the first study to assess regular ayahuasca users from a communitarian public health perspective. The data suggest that the study participants had high levels of general, mental, and positive health, and showed excellent levels in terms of adjustment and coping strategies, in addition to having healthy lifestyle habits. Study results do not suggest the possible effects of ayahuasca, but they show how the ritualistic use of a drug considered a hallucinogen is not associated with negative consequences in terms of adjustment or physical and psychological health.

#### ***5. New Insights into the Chemical Composition of Ayahuasca***

National Library of Medicine (NIH [link](#))

Recently, ayahuasca has captured the attention of the scientific community as part of the “renaissance of psychedelic studies”. Several reports highlight its potential therapeutic applications in clinical and nonclinical settings for the treatment of depression, grief, eating disorders and substance use disorders (SUDs). In addition, preclinical studies have shown that DMT,  $\beta$ -carbolines, and ayahuasca preparations present antidepressant-like effects in animal models and that administration of the beverage can block ethanol (alcohol) preference in an animal model of dependence.<sup>26</sup>

Ayahuasca, commonly translated from the Quechua language as “vine of the spirits” or “vine of the dead”, is a psychedelic beverage originally from the Amazon rainforest used in different shamanic settings for a variety of medicinal, spiritual, and cultural purposes.<sup>1</sup> It is prepared by boiling in water an admixture of the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi*, which is a source of  $\beta$ -carboline alkaloids, and other plants containing N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), usually *Psychotria viridis* (Figure Figure11) or *Dipterocarpus cabrerana*, (where the preparation name is usually referred to as *yagé*).<sup>2</sup>

Almost four decades ago, ayahuasca traveled from its traditional uses in the Amazon basin to religious, therapeutic, and spiritual centers with a worldwide distribution.<sup>3,4</sup> Brazilian churches that use ayahuasca as part of their religious practices, such as the Santo Daime and União do Vegetal, as well as shamanic practices involving the ingestion of the beverage in group rituals, have expanded globally within the psychospiritual transnational networks.<sup>4-7</sup>

## ***6. Ayahuasca and public health II: health status in a large sample of Ayahuasca ceremony participants in the Netherlands***

Leiden University Scholarly Publications (LU [link](#)) - The findings of this study indicate that long-term participants in ayahuasca ceremonies have better general well-being, fewer chronic and lifestyle diseases, and are more physically active compared to the normative Dutch data, as well as having a more balanced diet. (according to national dietary guidelines; Health Council of the Netherlands 2015).

Other studies that investigated the health of ayahuasca ceremony participants similarly reported differences in lifestyle, well being, nutrition, and physical activity (Kaasik and Kreegipuu 2020; Ona et al. 2019). It had been suggested that hallucinogens may promote healthful behaviors and may reduce the risk of developing “lifestyle diseases” such as diabetes, high cholesterol and blood pressure, which contribute to personal suffering, premature mortality, and public health costs (Teixeira et al. 2021).

Two recent studies report an association between classic hallucinogens and lower odds of being overweight or obese, and lower odds of having diabetes, cardiometabolic diseases, and/or cancer (Simonsson et al. 2021; Simonsson, Sexton, and Hendricks 2021). In addition, observational studies reported improvements of indicators of mental health and overall well-being among ayahuasca ceremony participants (Gonzalez et al. 2021; Kaasik and Kreegipuu 2020; Maia, Daldegan-Bueno, and Tófoli 2020).

## ***7. Ayahuasca's entwined efficacy: An ethnographic study of ritual healing from addiction***

PubMed – NIH Library of Medicine ([NIH link](#))

**Background:** A range of studies has demonstrated the efficacy of the psychoactive Amazonian brew ayahuasca in addressing substance addiction. These have revealed that physiological and psychological mechanisms are deeply enmeshed. This article focuses on how interactive ritual contexts support the healing effort. The study of psychedelic-assisted treatments for addiction has much to gain from ethnographic analyses of healing experiences within the particular ecologies of use and care, where these interventions are rendered efficacious.

### **8. Associations between ayahuasca consumption in naturalistic settings and current alcohol and drug use: Results of a large international cross-sectional survey**

National Library of Medicine – (NIH [link](#))

In the context of both expanding naturalistic use and academic research interest in the therapeutic use of ayahuasca, our dataset of 8,629 ayahuasca drinkers from more than 40 countries provides a unique opportunity to investigate associations between ayahuasca consumption in naturalistic settings and the use of alcohol and other drugs.

We identified a strong positive association between the consumption of ayahuasca and the likelihood of never or rarely drinking alcohol, never or rarely engaging in risky drinking (>4 standard drinks on one occasion) and having not consumed a range of drugs in the past month.

Our findings suggesting anti-substance use effects are consistent with those reported in several smaller studies. Analysis of outcomes for 36 patients at the Takiwasi (therapeutic community) drug treatment centre in Peru, which uses ayahuasca along with other traditional plants, identified significant decreases in addiction severity outcomes for drug and alcohol use, as well as reduced emotional distress and enhanced wellbeing [60].

Similarly, an observational study of First Nations young people in Canada provided with ayahuasca-assisted treatment for problematic substance use reported psychological and wellbeing benefits as well as reductions in tobacco, alcohol and cocaine use at 6 months [30].

A global survey of drug users, including 527 ayahuasca drinkers, found this group to have lower problematic alcohol consumption than other psychedelic users, but not non-psychedelic users; however, heterogeneity of groups was noted [61].

A number of studies have also reported lower rates of alcohol and other drug use among members of ayahuasca churches in Brazil, when compared to a comparison group or the Brazilian population, with these effects visible even among samples with a higher lifetime incidence of illicit drug use or dependence.

### **9. Ayahuasca-assisted therapy for addiction: results from a preliminary observational study in Canada**

PubMed National Library of Medicine (NIH [link](#))

This paper reports results from a preliminary observational study of ayahuasca-assisted treatment for problematic substance use and stress delivered in a rural First Nations community in British Columbia, Canada.

Ayahuasca-assisted therapy appears to be associated with statistically significant improvements in several factors related to problematic substance use among a rural aboriginal population. These findings suggest participants may have experienced positive psychological and behavioral changes in response to this therapeutic approach, and that more rigorous research of ayahuasca-assisted therapy for problematic substance use is warranted.

## ***10. Psychotherapeutic and neurobiological processes associated with ayahuasca: A proposed model and implications for therapeutic use***

Frontiers in Neuroscience (FN [link](#))

Observational and qualitative studies investigating ayahuasca's therapeutic effects have identified improvements in some psychological skills or traits such as decentering (Franquesa et al., 2018; Domínguez-Clavé et al., 2019); certain mindfulness capabilities (acceptance, non-judgmental and non-reactive processing, and improved observation) (Thomas et al., 2013; Soler et al., 2016; Uthaug et al., 2018); cognitive flexibility (Stemme et al., 2008; Murphy-Beiner and Soar, 2020); and emotional regulation (Domínguez-Clavé et al., 2019).

Broader psychological and well being benefits have also been identified among those drinking ayahuasca. These include increased confidence, optimism, independence, and positive mood (Barbosa et al., 2009), higher levels of self-transcendence and lower harm avoidance (Bouso et al., 2012), increased satisfaction with life (Uthaug et al., 2018) as well as increased openness to therapeutic interventions and improvements in both anxiety and depression (Perkins et al., 2021a).

Beneficial effects have also been reported in relation to interpersonal relationships, sense of self, creativity, somatic perception, sense of connection, substance use, and other health behaviors (Thomas et al., 2013; Lafrance et al., 2017; Bathje et al., 2021; Perkins et al., 2021a).

Additional benefit may also be associated with the reported modulation of some personality traits after ayahuasca consumption including increased agreeableness, openness to experience, and extraversion, and reduced neuroticism and negative emotionality (Mendes Rocha et al., 2021).

## ***11. Changes in mental health, well being and personality following ayahuasca consumption: Results of a naturalistic longitudinal study***

Frontiers in Pharmacology (FP [link](#))

Fifty-three attendees (32 women, 21 men) completed pre and post ayahuasca assessments with 55.6% of the sample reporting a complete mystical experience based on the MEQ-30. One-month post-ayahuasca, significant reductions were identified in depression, anxiety, stress, alcohol and cannabis use, body dissociation, accepting external influence, self-alienation, impulsivity, and negative affect/emotionality.

Significant increases were identified in positive mood, self-efficacy, authentic living, extraversion, agreeableness, open-mindedness, spirituality, and satisfaction with relationships. While facets of the mystical experience held little predictive validity on outcome measures, baseline traits, particularly high negative emotionality and body dissociation, and low sense of self-efficacy, robustly predicted improvements in mental health, well being and personality following ayahuasca consumption: Results of a naturalistic longitudinal study.

## **12. Potential Use of Ayahuasca in Grief Therapy**

ResearchGate (RG [link](#))

This is the first study to explore the therapeutic potential of ayahuasca in grieving processes. The findings from this study indicate that people who used ayahuasca reported lower level of grief than people who attended a peer-support group. This result stems from the fact that although both groups were comparable in the level of grief at the moment of death, the level of grief presented in the Present Feelings scale (TRIG) was lower in the ayahuasca group. Also, a significantly greater proportion of ayahuasca participants reported direct benefits on some of the psychological and interpersonal dimensions that are central to grief processes.

## **13. Ayahuasca Global Consumption and Reported Deaths in the Media**

ICEERS ([link](#)).

For years, a number of concerns have been raised in the field of ayahuasca research that, so far, no one has tried to systematically resolve. The first consideration:

How many people in the world have taken ayahuasca in their lifetime? How many people take ayahuasca each year? How many servings of ayahuasca are taken each year? And another important question:

What do we know about the deaths the media has attributed to ayahuasca?

It seems that answering the first question by estimating the prevalence of ayahuasca consumption globally is valuable to understand ayahuasca's expansion and its social, economic, and environmental implications. Comparing these numbers alongside an analysis of the deaths the media attributed to ayahuasca would amplify the value of this information collectively. It can also help shed light on the alleged danger of ayahuasca which can be a tool to guide public policies.

## **Deaths Attributed to Ayahuasca**

As part of this three-year study ICEERS examined media-reported deaths attributed to ayahuasca. One of the conclusions of the study was that:

*To date worldwide, no forensic examination or toxicological analysis has determined the combination of *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis* or *Diplopterys cabrerana* (the traditional ayahuasca brew) has caused poisoning leading to death.*

## **14. Therapeutic Effects of Ceremonial Ayahuasca Use for Methamphetamine Use Disorders and Other Mental Health Challenges: Case Studies in an Indigenous Community in Sonora, Mexico**

PubMed ([link](#))

The cases presented above suggest that the application of traditionally used entheogens within a culturally adapted community-based therapeutic programme for Indigenous mental health can be an effective therapeutic resource for supporting recovery from depression, grief, anxiety, PTSD and systemic trauma, and substance use disorders. The selected cases show specifically how ceremonial use of ayahuasca within a culturally adapted, community-based treatment program may be safe, tolerable, and demonstrates therapeutic potential.

Perhaps, most significant is the way in which this intervention has potential to support recovery from diverse mental health challenges among family and community members in addition to, and often as part of, individual recovery. Incorporating family members and community practices into treatment is of utmost importance for improving quality of life and well-being among historically oppressed Indigenous communities.

## **15. Influence of Context and Setting on the Mental Health and Well being Outcomes of Ayahuasca Drinkers: Results of a Large International Survey**

Frontiers In Pharmacology (FP [link](#))

Our study has a number of important strengths, including a large sample size, international cross-cultural sampling frame, and inclusion of ayahuasca drinkers from a range of different contexts of consumption Therapeutic motivation was the most consistently associated of the motivation variables, including with a greater number of self-insights, stronger subjective spiritual experience and higher PWG. Moreover, unlike previous studies, we are also able to identify and consider separately the sizable wellbeing and mental health benefits associated with the social and community aspects of ayahuasca drinking, on which ceremony practices, additional support, and drinkers motivations also have an influence.

### **16. Ayahuasca use and reported effects on depression and anxiety symptoms: An international cross-sectional study of 11,912 consumers**

Journal of Effective Disorders Reports – Science Direct (SC [link](#))

Of participants reporting depression (n = 1571) or anxiety (n = 1125) at the time of consuming Ayahuasca, 78% reported that their depression was either ‘very much’ improved (46%), or ‘completely resolved’ (32%); while 70% of those with anxiety reported that their symptoms were ‘very much’ improved (54%), or ‘completely resolved’ (16%).

A range of factors were associated with greater reported affective symptoms improvement, including subjective mystical experience, number of Ayahuasca sessions, and number of personal psychological insights experienced. 2.7% and 4.5% of drinkers with depression or anxiety, respectively, reported worsening of symptoms.

### **17. Psychedelic Medicine: A Rapid Review of Therapeutic Applications and Implications for Future Research (Canada)**

Homewood Research Institute, Guelph, ON. (HRI [link](#))

Amidst growing medico-therapeutic interest in psychedelics, the socio-political factors of the 1960s and 70s driven by racist policy and political persecution led to these drugs being declared illegal, including in Canada, despite a lack of evidence for toxicity or addictive potential. Their designation as Schedule I substances under the UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and consequently within the Canadian Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, meant that they were considered as having a high potential for non-medical use<sup>1</sup>, no currently accepted therapeutic application, and a lack of accepted safety for use under medical supervision.

The combination of the socio-political climate, shrinking funding opportunities, and methodological issues have severely limited new research and development since the 1970s. The past 15 years has seen a rapid resurgence of work in both basic and clinical psychedelic science, with the majority of the work focused on substance use, mental health, and related conditions. A wide range of topics are being covered within the domains of: neuroscience and psychopharmacology; treatment effectiveness with associated mechanisms of action and safety considerations; palliative, end-of-life, and spiritual care; treatment guidelines; training and certification of therapists and other practitioners; health policy and prevention; as well as anthropology, sociology, and global health.

### **18. The Impact of Ayahuasca on Suicidality: Results From a Randomized Controlled Trial**

Frontiers in Pharmacology (FP [link](#))

Interestingly, within the ayahuasca group, the relationship between changes in suicidality and changes in nonsuicide-related depressive symptoms approached significance, with a large effect size (i.e.,  $r = .53$ ). These findings suggest that the impact of ayahuasca on suicidality may, in part, be due to its impact on nonsuicide-related depressive symptoms or mechanisms overlapping both non-suicide-related depressive symptoms and suicidality. Research suggests that suicide functions as a means of escaping intense emotional distress (Baumeister, 1990; Shneidman, 1998). Extant research indicates that psychedelics in general, and ayahuasca in particular, leads to decreases in emotional distress (for a review, see dos Santos et al., 2018). Similarly, a recent study found that the administration of ayahuasca led to decreases in emotion dysregulation, within a community sample and among individuals with BPD traits (Domínguez-Clavé et al., 2019). Similarly, among males in a community sample, lifetime use of psychedelics was associated with lower levels of emotion dysregulation (Thiessen et al., 2018). One particular means through which ayahuasca may decrease emotion dysregulation is via increased mindfulness-related capacities (e.g., acceptance and decentering), which have been shown to increase after administration of ayahuasca (Thomas et al., 2013; Soler et al., 2016; Sampedro et al., 2017; Domínguez-Clavé et al., 2019; Soler et al., 2018; Uthaug et al., 2018).

### **19. Ayahuasca Treatment Outcome Project (ATOP): One Year Results from Takiwasi Center and Implications for Psychedelic Science**

(PubMed [\(link\)](#))

**Results:** The group change from baseline to the one-year follow up was significant and in the anticipated direction for alcohol and drug use severity, depression and anxiety, and some dimensions of quality of life. There was considerable individual variation in outcomes and treatment duration. The majority of participants rated all aspects of the program as important, including the spiritual and therapeutic significance of the ayahuasca experience which was rated as very significant.

**Conclusion:** Based on the positive one-year outcomes, and within the limitations of an uncontrolled observational study design, the findings suggest promise for the effectiveness of the use of ayahuasca in a multifactorial treatment context for individuals with significant treatment histories, high levels of comorbidity and treatment motivation. Results highlight considerable variation in individual experience that merit in-depth qualitative analysis. Implications for ayahuasca-assisted and other psychedelic-assisted treatment alternatives are discussed.

## **20. Neuropharmacology of N,N-Dimethyltryptamine**

(National Library of Medicine [link](#))

This paper reviews the current literature of both the recreational use of DMT and its potential roles as an endogenous neurotransmitter. DMT appears to have limited neurotoxicity and other adverse effects except for intense cardiovascular effects when administered intravenously in large doses. Because of its role in nervous system signaling, DMT may be a useful experimental tool in exploring how brain works, and may also be a useful clinical tool for treatment of anxiety and psychosis.

## **21. Other Resources**

ICEERS.org – [Ayahuasca Global Consumption and Reported Deaths](#), June 2023.

YouTube – David Suzuki The Nature of Things - [The Jungle Prescription](#), CBC Documentary 2011

Global News - [These Ontario police officers are using ayahuasca to treat their PTSD](#), 2019

ICEERS.org - Ayahuasca Safety Profile Fact Sheet (ICEERS [link](#))

Companionship of the Sacred Vine medical questionnaire (CSV [link](#))

CSV - Ayahuasca Decision-Making Guide (CSV [link](#))

The Spanish National Police magazine recognizes that ayahuasca is not illegal in Spain and "brings benefits to those who consume it." (PF [link](#))

Parliament of Canada – The Opioid Crisis in Canada (PC [link](#))

Substance-related acute toxicity deaths in Canada from 2016 to 2017: A review of coroner and medical examiner files (CAN [link](#))