



# OPIS

Organisation for the  
Prevention of  
Intense Suffering

## PRESS RELEASE

### **OPIS policy paper calls for legalisation of psilocybin for treatment of cluster headaches**

**Geneva, Switzerland, 10 November 2020** – The Organisation for the Prevention of Intense Suffering (OPIS), a think-and-do tank promoting compassionate, evidence-based governance, has released a policy paper that calls for legalising access to psilocybin and related substances for the treatment of cluster headaches, one of the most excruciating conditions known to medicine. Policy recommendations include allowing doctors to prescribe currently restricted substances such as psilocybin, LSD, DMT and 5-MeO-DALT to patients with cluster headaches and ensuring that these substances can be readily produced or imported for such medical use. It is also recommended to modify regulations to ensure that patients who purchase or possess small amounts of psychoactive substances for personal therapeutic use cannot be charged with a crime or offence. The policy paper, which summarises existing evidence and contains numerous patient testimonials, was co-signed by several prominent neurologists, ethicists and other experts.

The policy paper can be downloaded [here](#).

OPIS has also produced a 2-minute [animated video](#) explaining the issue.

#### **Cluster headaches cause excruciating pain**

[Cluster headaches](#), also known as “suicide headaches” or Horton’s neuralgia, affect about 1 in 1000 people, a prevalence similar to multiple sclerosis. Attacks affect one side of the head, centred on the eye, and are often compared to having a red-hot poker or ice pick driven through the eye into the brain. The level of pain experienced by patients is often evaluated at 10 on a scale of 0-10 – significantly higher than childbirth, kidney stones or migraines. Attacks can last an hour or longer and recur many times a day, and patients may go to extreme measures, including banging their head against the wall, to try to distract themselves from the overwhelming pain. Most patients have episodic clusters lasting 1-3 months and occurring seasonally, while 15% have chronic clusters that can occur daily for years without a break. Most patients have had suicidal ideations, and suicide rates have been reported to be as high as 20x the average.

#### **Efficacy of psilocybin and related substances where medical options are insufficient**

Current medical options, including high-flow oxygen to abort attacks and various pharmaceuticals, are helpful but insufficient, as they cannot reliably prevent attacks, not all patients respond, and side effects limit their use. But there is clear evidence, from a

large number of patient reports and systematic scientific studies based on patient surveys, that psilocybin and several chemically related substances known as indoleamines are effective, often dramatically so and even at sub-hallucinogenic doses, for many patients in aborting and preventing attacks and even entire cycles. However, their legal status in most countries makes it difficult for patients to access them.

Jonathan Leighton, Executive Director of OPIS, said, “The accumulated evidence makes it clear that psilocybin, LSD and related substances can be tremendously useful for safely stopping and preventing the overwhelming pain of cluster headaches. Current barriers to access are not justifiable from a scientific, ethical or human rights perspective. Doctors must be able to prescribe these substances, and current drug laws that criminalise patients seeking relief from their pain must be changed. Fortunately we are seeing a shift towards recognition of the therapeutic potential of these substances and the harm done by overly strict drug laws.”

### **About OPIS**

The Organisation for the Prevention of Intense Suffering (OPIS) is a think-and-do tank designing and promoting blueprints for a compassionate society that eliminates the preventable suffering of all sentient beings. We advocate for solutions to specific causes of intense suffering and for ethical, evidence-based governance. OPIS is focusing on improving access to effective pain medication, including therapeutic [morphine](#) for terminal cancer patients in lower-income countries, and on ending the horrors of factory farming and other torture of non-human animals. OPIS was founded in 2016 as a Swiss non-profit association and is headquartered in Geneva.

[www.preventsuffering.org](http://www.preventsuffering.org)

### **For more information**

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