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MEDIA RELEASE: 60 MINUTES STORY ON PSYCHEDELIC DRUGS

Last night, Channel Nine's 60 Minutes program highlighted mounting evidence that psychotherapy assisted by psychedelic drugs can be effective in the treatment of some mental health conditions for individuals who have not responded to current evidence-based treatments.

Australia's only dedicated psychedelic research organisation, Psychedelic Research in Science & Medicine (PRISM) has been working with national and international stakeholders since 2011 to establish several local clinical trials. PRISM Executive Officer Dr Martin Williams said:

'Australia is falling behind in this promising field. We want to see Australia catch up with the rest of the world and be ready to provide these treatments once they are approved by the US Food and Drug Administration. Though to do this, we first need to engage in rigorous research to confirm their efficacy in the local context, and to demonstrate that Australia has the people and infrastructure to provide these treatments safely and effectively.'

The 60 Minutes program also showed how growing awareness of these treatments within Australia is leading to an emerging illicit underground psychedelic psychotherapy scene. Dr Stephen Bright, a clinically trained psychologist and Senior Lecturer of Addiction at Edith Cowan University, cautioned:

'Accessing illegal psychedelic treatments from people who are not qualified and provide no medical oversight is dangerous. The illegal underground treatments being offered in Australia do not contain all the important elements that make the psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy effective, such as psychotherapy preparation sessions and multiple drug sessions followed by comprehensive psychological integration.'

Given that desperate people are increasingly taking desperate measures and endangering their lives and their mental health by taking illegal drugs, it is more important than ever to progress local research. Doing so will allow these treatments to be properly integrated into our medical and mental health systems, where they belong. Dr Williams said:

'Unfortunately the staged underground session shown by 60 Minutes does not help our cause and it simply encourages people to seek out potentially harmful treatment. We'd much rather see the media promoting Australian research that's moving us closer to the legal availability of psychedelic medicines.'

PRISM, a registered charity, is working with a range of government and non-government organisations to expand Australian research.

For further comment please contact:

Dr Martin Williams martin@prism.edu.au

Dr Stephen Bright s.bright@ecu.edu.au