

Barrow, ASU embark on one of first clinical trials of ibogaine in the US

Researchers bring a psychedelic compound into a controlled clinical setting with support from a \$5 million state grant

By Pete Zrioka, ASU News
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For people living with post-traumatic stress disorder, depression or addiction, existing treatments do not always bring relief. Some are desperate enough to travel outside the United States for experimental therapies that are not approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

A cursory Google search turns up a litany of options: a treatment center in Tijuana, Mexico. A wellness institute with two locations in Cozumel. A clinic in Cancún.

These are just a few of the clinics offering ibogaine, a plant-derived psychedelic compound with broad effects on brain chemistry. Researchers have long been interested in its potential anti-addictive and antidepressant properties, and patients who travel abroad for treatment often report dramatic improvements.

"I don't think it's plausible that people going to Mexico and just getting a nice beach vacation would be seeing this much improvement in symptoms, but we need a control group. We need to compare ibogaine to something," says [Candace Lewis](#), an Arizona State University assistant professor with a dual appointment in the [School of Life Sciences](#) and [Department of Psychology](#).

Studying ibogaine with a control group has been nearly impossible in the United States due to its classification as a Schedule I drug, the most restricted category under the Controlled Substances Act of 1970.

But a \$5 million grant from the Arizona Department of Health Services could help researchers learn more about the safety and efficacy of the compound. In this study awarded to [Barrow Neurological Institute](#) with a subcontract to ASU, Lewis and other university researchers are beginning to explore ibogaine's therapeutic potential in one of the first clinical trials of its kind in the United States.

Researchers hope to enroll the first participant in 2027 and will use standardized assessments, brain imaging and other lab tests to evaluate whether ibogaine improves participants' symptoms and quality of life, and to establish its safety profile.

The award reflects ASU's growing strength and expertise in the emerging realm of psychedelic therapeutics — also known as neuroplastogens — which university co-investigators [Dr. Holly Lisanby](#), Lewis and [Sarah Mennenga](#) bring to the study.

Founding dean and Foundation Professor at the [John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering](#), Lisanby is an internationally renowned psychiatrist and clinical translational researcher who brings an extensive background in rapid-acting neurotherapeutics, and who led the [National Institute of Mental Health's Division of Translational Research](#) for a decade, where she oversaw the drug development pipeline for mental health.

Mennenga, a research assistant professor in the School of Life Sciences, has years of experience in behavioral neuroscience research and studying the effects of psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy. She also understands how to navigate the complex regulatory environment of Schedule I drugs. Lewis also has an extensive body of work in psychedelic compounds and how they affect the epigenome. The three are also collaborating on [a separate study of the potential of psychedelic therapy](#).

"The need is great, the science is evolving and rigorous research into potentially transformative therapies for brain health is urgently needed," Lisanby says. "At the John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering, we bring together medicine, science and engineering to tackle the most difficult health challenges facing our communities. This partnership reflects our shared commitment with the city of Phoenix to follow the science, ask the hard questions and find new ways to improve mental health and restore hope."

[Barrow Neuro Analytics Center](#) provides the clinical environment for the ibogaine study. Dr. Anna Burke, a neuropsychiatrist, is the principal investigator on the study. Barrow co-investigators include doctors [Susan Criswell](#), [Michael Lawton](#), [Susan Herman](#) and [Chia-Ling Phuah](#).

"Our vision for Barrow is to move beyond traditional neurology and neurosurgery to explore the mysteries of the mind, harnessing our clinical access to patients and the brain during interventions to better understand the brain's circuitry and functionality," Lawton said.

Neuroplastogen treatments like ibogaine are gaining momentum in the U.S. on both state and federal levels.

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has voiced support for compounds such as MDMA and psilocybin to treat mental health. President Trump signed an executive order in April 2025 aimed at accelerating research and access to psychedelic treatments for mental illness.

In March 2025, Gov. Katie Hobbs and Arizona lawmakers included \$5 million in the state budget to study ibogaine. The Texas legislature also threw their support behind the compound with \$50 million the same year.

Why this research matters

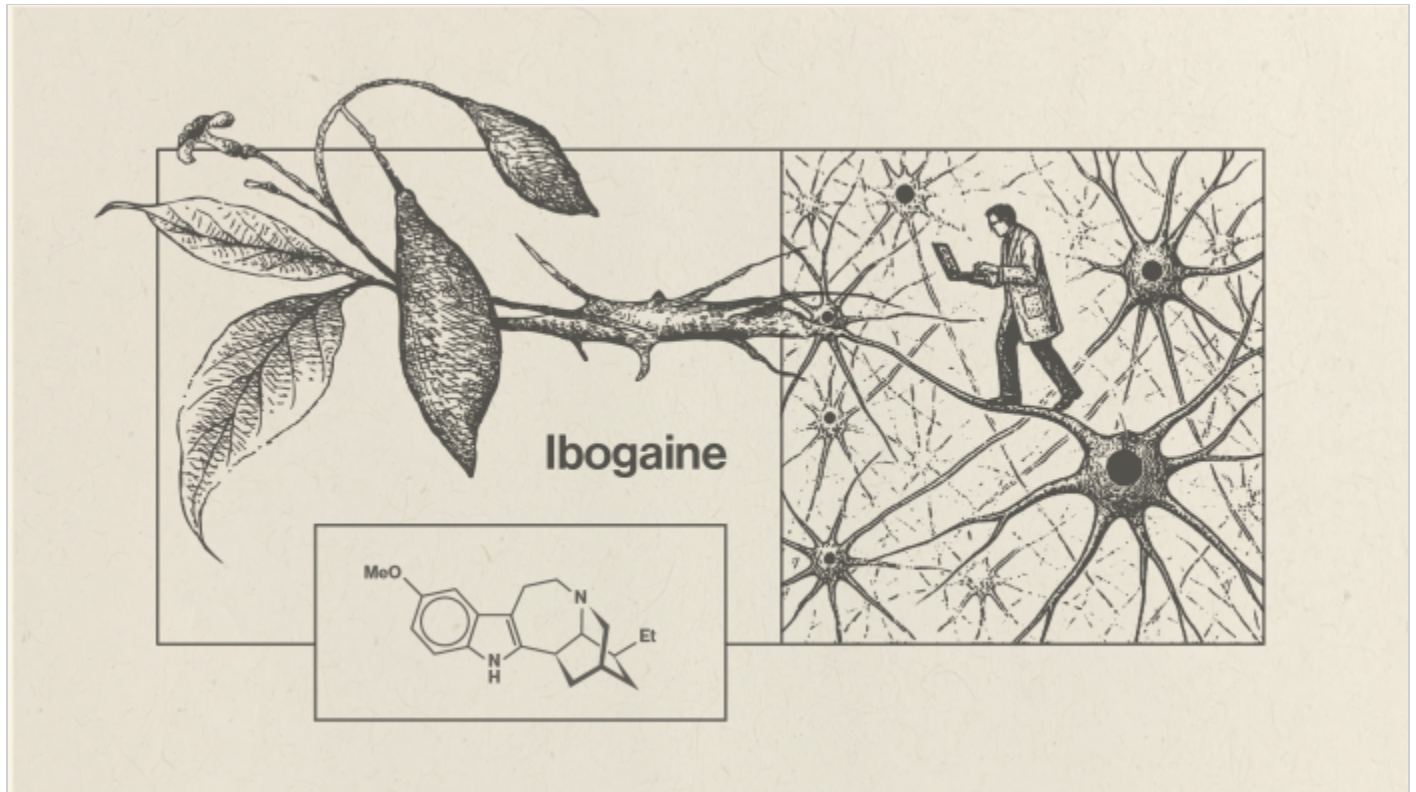
Research is the invisible hand that powers America's progress. It unlocks discoveries and creates opportunity. It develops new technologies and new ways of doing things.

Learn more about ASU discoveries that are contributing to changing the world and making America the world's leading economic power at researchmatters.asu.edu.

“We are excited to see Arizona being one of the states leading the charge in funding psychedelic research that could help millions, including veterans,” Lewis says. “This also could mean big things for Arizona as a state and ASU as an institution emerging as a leader in this field.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Ibogaine, a psychoactive compound derived from a shrub found in Central Africa, has long been reported to help those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and addiction. However, its status as a Schedule I drug has limited its study in the United States, with patients instead seeking treatment at unregulated clinics abroad. Illustration by Andy Keena/ASU