

Ex-British army chief calls on ministers to back MDMA-assisted therapy for veterans

By Dan Sabbagh, *The Guardian*, Sun 1 Feb 2026

Sir Nick Carter, who was chief of the defence staff until 2021, is calling for the government to ease restrictions on the party drug MDMA so that it can be tested more cheaply as a treatment for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He said existing regulations meant a single gram of "medical grade" MDMA cost about £10,000

5 compared with a street price of about £40, inflating the cost of trials.

A study in *Nature Medicine* showed that PTSD symptoms were eliminated in 71% of the 52 cases where MDMA-assisted therapy was tested. This means that MDMA therapy has the potential to be more effective than existing treatments for PTSD, which affects about 9% of military veterans who served at the time of deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan.

10 "What we want is for the government to make the cost of trials much cheaper. We're not asking for MDMA to be declassified, but there should be some sort of reduction in its classification when it comes to medical treatment," Carter said.

15 Potential benefits could reach beyond the military, Carter added. "This could help not just veterans, but others such as police and workers in other emergency services and the NHS as well," he said.

20 When used recreationally, in small doses, MDMA produces feelings of euphoria and acts as an empathogen, increasing feelings of wellbeing, empathy and compassion. It is these qualities mental health researchers want to take advantage of. "Essentially it affects the plasticity of the brain," Carter said. "So when the psychiatrist asks questions, the patient is much more responsive. The process needs to be closely supervised; it's not about creating a trip, but having the right effect."

25 One of those hoping to benefit is Martin Wade, 53, a former lawyer with the British army, who developed complex PTSD several years after being deployed in Helmand province, Afghanistan with the Royal Marines in 2006-07.

30 In the years that followed a traumatizing experience Wade struggled with drink and his mental health, before being diagnosed with PTSD and ultimately being abruptly discharged from the military.

Wade said he wanted to be able to try MDMA assisted therapy, because he believed that the trials "really offer some hope to veterans".

35 Despite many years of conventional therapies "and all my ardent and best efforts to sort of melt the symptoms away", Wade said he had never been able to successfully eliminate "hyper-vigilance, hyper-arousal and flashbacks and nightmares."

35 Wade called for more help for those struggling with PTSD. "What really irritates me is that when you are in somewhere like Afghanistan, you realise how far missiles are being used at £80,000 per warhead.

"And you think, just if the government would give each veteran that's really struggling £80,000 worth of therapy."