Clinical Guidelines for Cleft Lip and Palate Care: A Systematic Review

Omar Barasain, MD; Peter Anto Johnson, MSc, BSc (Hons); Kevin Nickel, MD, BSc; Shawn Dodd, MD, MSc; Curtis R. Budden, MD, MEd, FRCSC

Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Alberta; Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, University of Alberta; Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, University of British Columbia

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INTRODUCTION

- CL/CLP care is complex and multidisciplinary, yet clinical practice is not standardized across centres, disciplines, or teams.
- **Objective:** identify and appraise the scope, quality, consistency, and limitations of guidelines for CL/CLP care in children.

METHODS

- PRISMA-guided systematic review; PROSPERO: CRD42021258625.
- Databases: MEDLINE, EMBASE, Scopus, Web of Science, and Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews through January 2025.
- Guideline quality appraised using the AGREE II instrument.

KEY MESSAGE

54

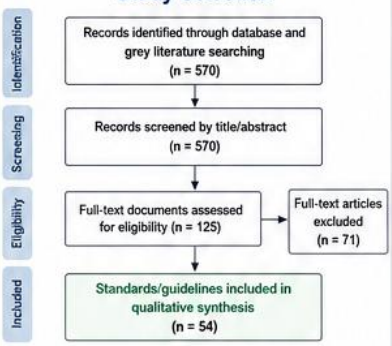
included standards/guidelines

No guideline covered all 9 domains

RCPCH Best Practice Guide was most comprehensive

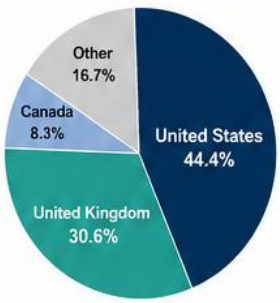
RESULTS

Study Selection



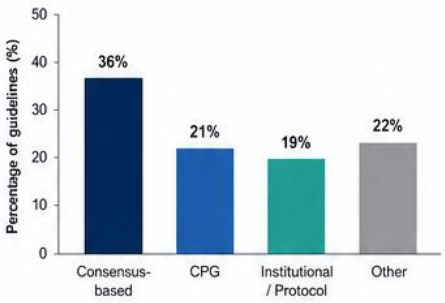
Final synthesis: 54 standards/guidelines

Country of Origin



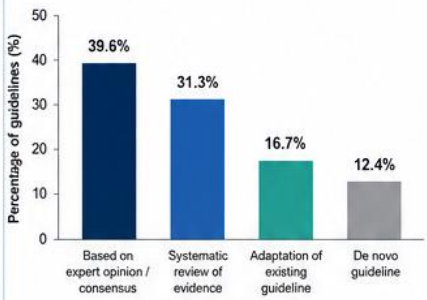
Total = 54 standards/guidelines

Design / Type



Total = 54 standards/guidelines

Development Method



Total = 54 standards/guidelines

AGREE II Quality

Highest mean domain Scope & Purpose — **6.65 / 7**

Lowest mean domain Applicability — **5.01 / 7**

Highest overall guideline RCPCH Best Practice Guide — **7 / 7**

Standards meeting consensus Consensus quality assessment — **21 / 54**

Scores range from 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest)

Nine Thematic Domains Used to Code Recommendations

- Feeding / Nutrition
- Orthodontics / Dental Health
- Surgery / Perioperative Care
- Speech / Otology
- Breathing
- Appearance / Cosmetic Outcomes
- Psychosocial Development
- Team Composition & Dynamics
- Cost / Burden of Care

DISCUSSION

- Guidelines were dominated by expert consensus and CPGs, with persistent reliance on older multicentre cleft studies.
- Important discrepancies were identified in presurgical orthopedics and recommended cleft-team composition.
- Applicability was the weakest AGREE II domain, suggesting limited attention to implementation barriers, resource implications, and uptake strategies.

CONCLUSION

- Existing CL/CLP guidelines can be organized into nine key domains of care.
- Current recommendations are broadly useful but remain incomplete and inconsistently comprehensive.
- Future guidelines should prioritize stronger methodology, stakeholder involvement, implementation strategies, and contemporary evidence.

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Contact: Curtis R. Budden, MD MEd FRCSC, Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, University of Alberta | budden@ualberta.ca

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