

Beyond agreement: How is non-consensus handled in Delphi panels?

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The Problem



Delphi panels are increasingly used to synthesize expert insights and published evidence to achieve consensus. However, the pursuit of consensus may **overlook valuable insights** from areas of disagreement.

The **value of insights** derived from non-consensus is **unclear**, with guidance on handling non-consensus in Delphi panels **absent** from the ACCurate COnsensus Reporting Document (ACCORD) guideline.¹

What Did We Do?



A targeted literature review was conducted using PubMed, to identify a prespecified threshold of **200 search results**, designed to identify recent healthcare-related Delphi studies, sorted by most recent date of publication.

Eligibility Criteria

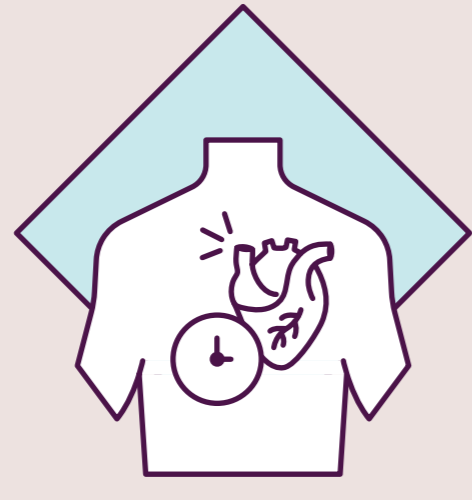
- ✓ Original research articles, consensus manuscripts, management guidance documents, white papers, policy reports
- ✓ Full-texts reporting original Delphi research
- ✓ Related to healthcare
- ✓ In English

Results were qualitatively analyzed to assess how statements not achieving consensus were reported, and whether insights derived from non-consensus contributed towards the key study outputs or recommendations.

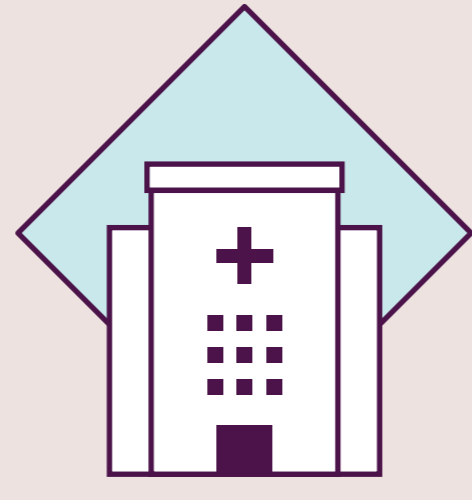
What Did We Find?

- ◆ **130 studies** were included in this analysis, covering **multiple geographies** and areas of **healthcare**.
- ◆ **70 studies** were **excluded** as they did not meet the **eligibility criteria**.
- ◆ The **majority** of included studies were published in 2024, **except one** published in 2023.

Areas of healthcare most frequently covered were:



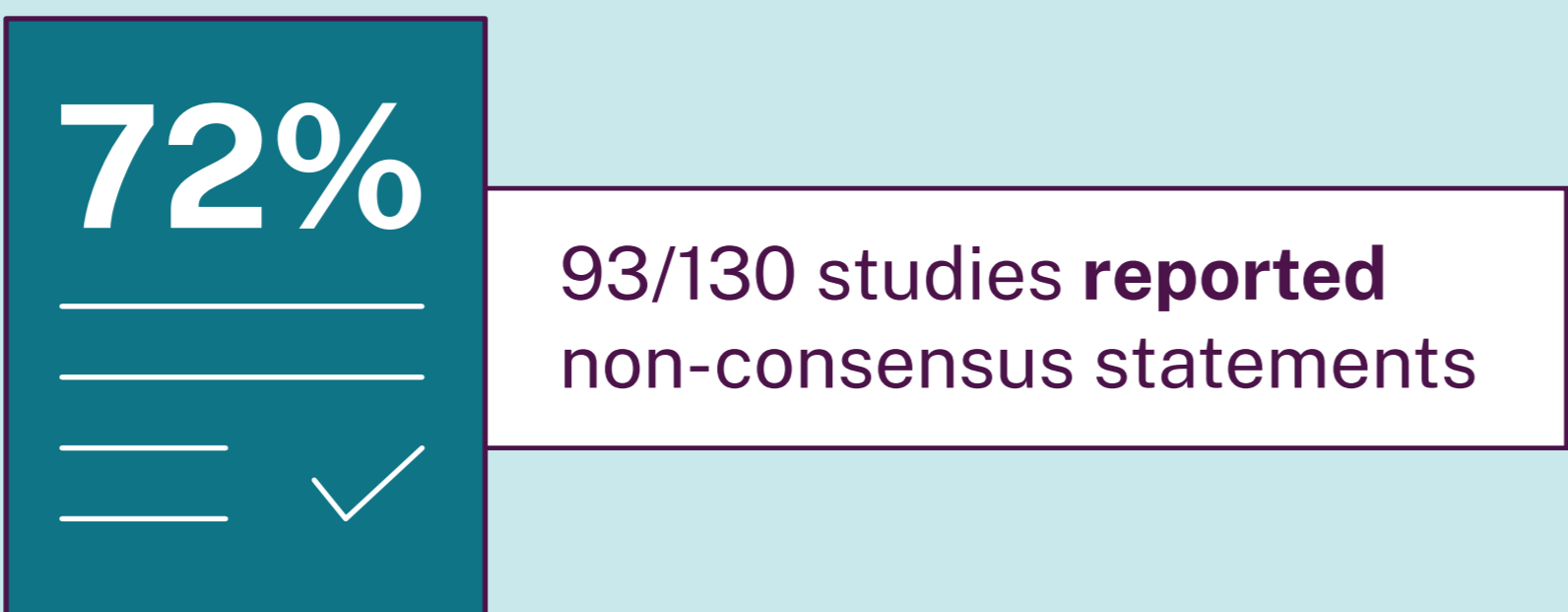
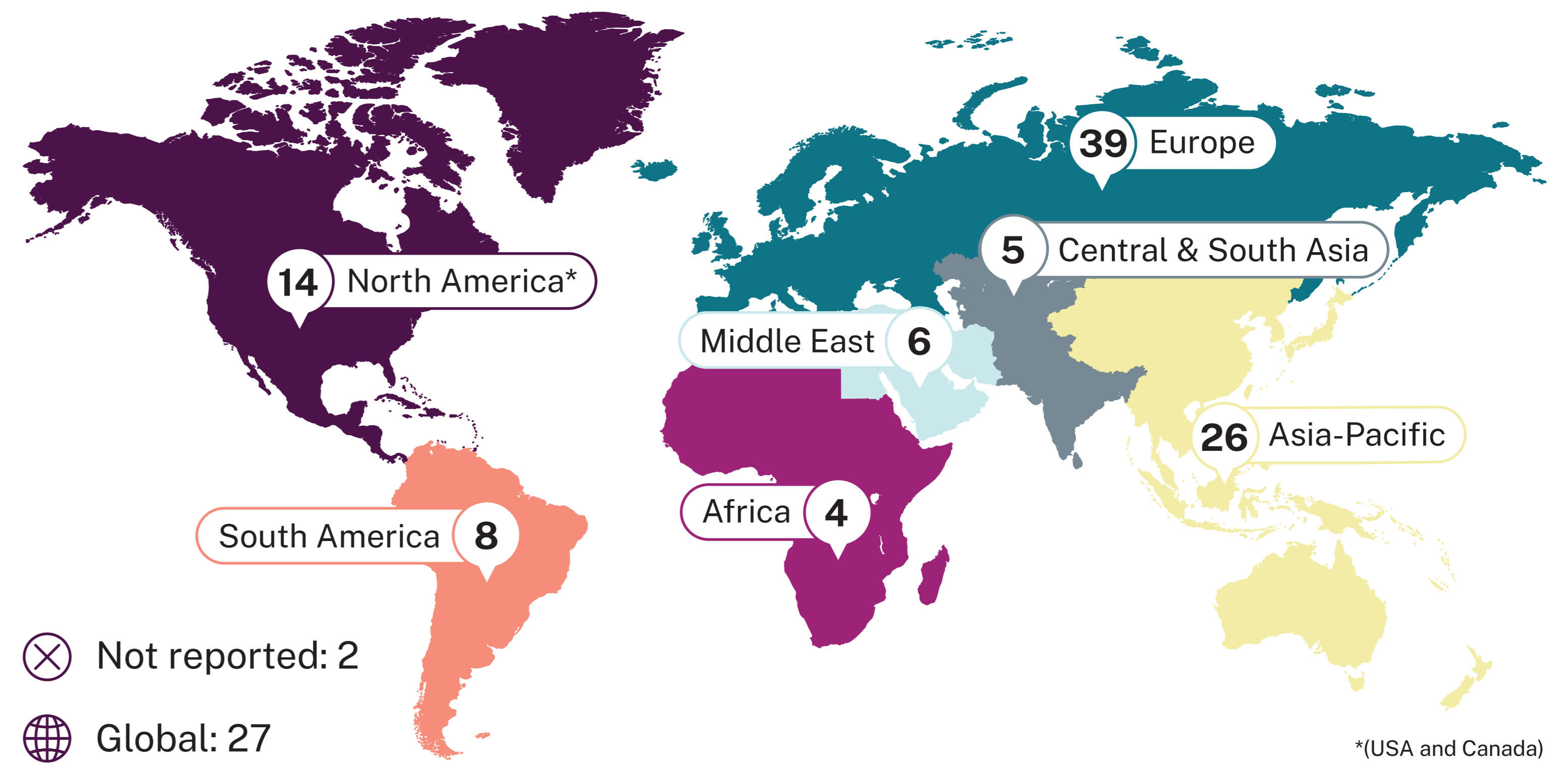
Non-communicable and other chronic diseases
(17 studies)



Emergency and critical care
(13 studies)



Mental health
(13 studies)



Of the **93 studies** that reported non-consensus statements:



52 studies reported non-consensus statements in the main text

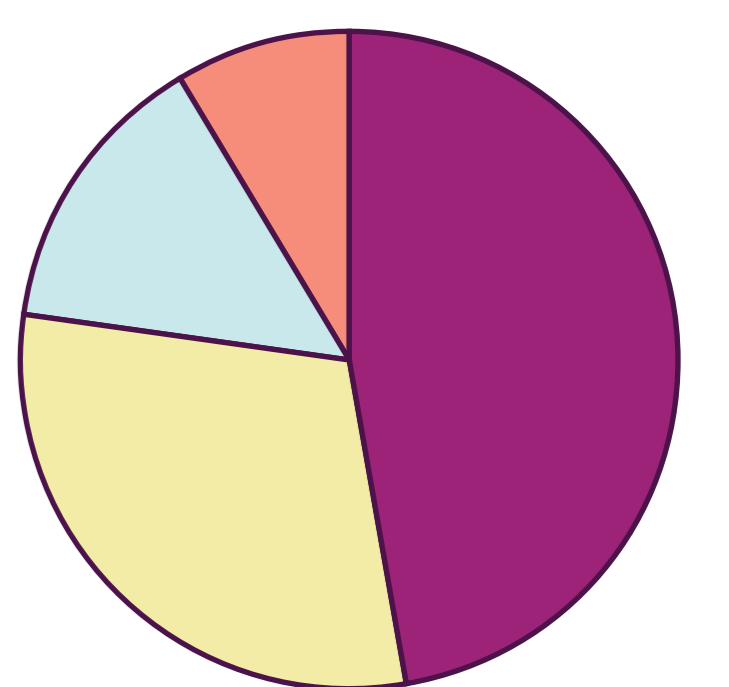


25 studies reported non-consensus statements in the supplementary materials



16 studies reported non-consensus statements in the main text and supplementary materials

- Non-consensus contributed to the discussion in **44 studies**
- **13 studies** reported dissent as a concluding outcome
- **8 studies** further analyzed statements that did not reach consensus
- Non-consensus statements did not contribute towards any further discussion or outcomes in **28 studies**

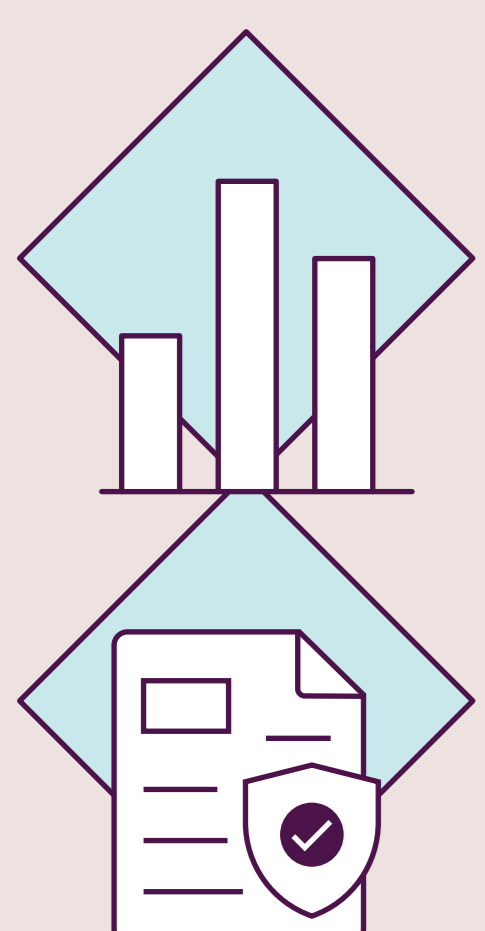


In the 8 studies that reported further discussion of statements that did not reach consensus, additional analyses were undertaken in the form of **consensus meetings**.

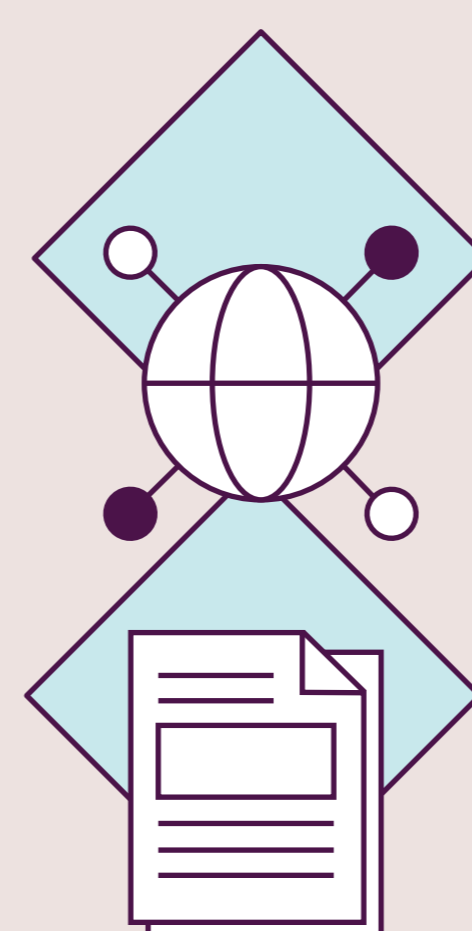
Following these meetings:

- ◆ One study converted statements that did not reach consensus to qualitative questions in the final Delphi round, to capture the breadth of debate amongst panellists.²
- ◆ One study conducted a follow-up analysis with a separate group of experts to further understand statements that did not reach consensus.³

Conclusions



- ◆ Our results highlight **inconsistent reporting** of non-consensus in Delphi studies.
- ◆ Although statements that did not reach consensus are typically reported, **dissent rarely contributes to further analysis** or shapes study outcomes.
- ◆ Reporting of non-consensus should form part of **best-practice reporting standards**; guidance on the exploration of non-consensus in Delphi panels should also be considered.



- ◆ More research is needed to understand the **potential value of non-consensus**, such as for highlighting evidence limitations, underlying ethical disagreements or misalignment between existing guidance and real-world experience.
- ◆ Further research into how the insights derived from non-consensus findings might be applied to **support more robust healthcare recommendations** would also be valuable.

Abbreviations: ACCORD: ACurate COnsensus Reporting Document.

Reference: ¹Gattrell WT, Logullo P, van Zureen EJ, Price A, Hughes EL, Blazey P, Winchester CC, Tovey D, Goldman K, Hungin AP, Harrison N. PLoS Med. 2024;21(1):e1004326; ²Hrincu V, Roy KT, Robillard JM. Alzheimer's & Dementia: Translational Research & Clinical Interventions (TRCI). 2024;10(3):e12496; ³Toro L, de Valk H, Zanetti L, Huot C, Tarantola A, Fournet N, Moulin L, Atoui A, Gassilloud B, Mouly D, Jourdain F. EuroSurveillance. 2024;9(28):2400231. Acknowledgements: The authors thank Ellie Denham, Costello Medical, and Courtney Gray, Costello Medical, for graphic design assistance. The authors thank Orla Woodward, PhD, Costello Medical, for medical writing support.

Presented at the International Society for Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP) 2025 European Meeting | London, UK | 27-29 January 2025