

CRISPR-Based Gene Editing in Rare Genetic Disorders

Marco Klein¹

¹ Associate Professor, School of Data Science, Baltic AI Research University, Tallinn, Estonia. Email: marco.klein720@gmail.com | ORCID: 9865-8600-0026-1437

ABSTRACT

CRISPR-Cas9 (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats associated protein 9) gene editing -- the programmable RNA-guided endonuclease system that generates sequence-specific DNA double-strand breaks followed by cellular repair through homology-directed repair (HDR) or non-homologous end joining (NHEJ) -- has moved from bacterial immune system curiosity to clinical therapeutic reality within a decade. The first CRISPR-based medicine, exagamglogene autotemcel (exa-cel; Casgevy; Vertex/CRISPR Therapeutics), received FDA approval in December 2023 for sickle cell disease and transfusion-dependent beta-thalassaemia -- a landmark that validates CRISPR gene editing as a clinically actionable therapeutic modality for rare haematological disorders. This review evaluates the clinical and late-stage preclinical evidence for CRISPR therapy across twelve rare genetic disorder indications, categorised by delivery strategy (ex vivo haematopoietic stem cell editing; in vivo LNP-delivered liver targeting; in vivo AAV-delivered tissue-specific editing) and editing mechanism (gene disruption; gene correction; base editing; prime editing). Ex vivo HSC editing for sickle cell disease and beta-thalassaemia achieves the most robust clinical outcomes -- fetal haemoglobin induction $\geq 30\%$ HbF (median 43.2% in CTX001 trial) correlating with freedom from vaso-occlusive crises in 29 of 29 patients with ≥ 12 months follow-up. In vivo CRISPR therapy (NTLA-2001 for transthyretin amyloidosis) achieved 87% serum TTR reduction with a single dose -- performance superior to existing RNAi therapy. Off-target editing remains the primary safety concern, with next-generation high-fidelity Cas9 variants (HiFi Cas9; eSpCas9) reducing off-target rates by 10-100-fold vs. wild-type.

Keywords: CRISPR-Cas9; gene editing; sickle cell disease; beta-thalassaemia; base editing; prime editing; off-target; rare genetic disorders

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1. Introduction

1.1 CRISPR: From Bacterial Immunity to Human Therapy

The CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing system was adapted for mammalian cell genome editing in 2012-2013 by the laboratories of Jennifer Doudna (Berkeley), Emmanuelle Charpentier (Berlin/Umea), and Feng Zhang (Broad Institute) -- work recognised with the 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry awarded to Doudna and Charpentier. The system's core components are a Cas9 endonuclease (the molecular scissors) and a guide RNA (gRNA; the GPS that directs Cas9 to the target DNA sequence). The gRNA contains a 20-nucleotide spacer complementary to the target genomic sequence; Cas9 generates a blunt-end double-strand break 3 bp upstream of the PAM (protospacer adjacent motif; NGG for SpCas9). The subsequent DNA repair pathway determines the editing outcome: NHEJ (the dominant pathway) produces insertion-deletion mutations (indels) that disrupt gene function; HDR (using a co-delivered DNA template) produces precise sequence correction but is limited to dividing cells.

1.2 The Rare Disease Opportunity

Rare genetic disorders -- defined as conditions affecting < 1 in 2,000 persons in Europe -- number approximately 7,000 distinct conditions affecting 300 million people worldwide. Most are monogenic: caused by a single gene mutation that is known and characterised, making the therapeutic target precise and the correction strategy potentially straightforward for gene editing. The commercial pharmaceutical model has historically underserved rare disease patients (orphan drug economics), but gene editing offers a potentially curative single-treatment approach that, if effective, eliminates lifetime treatment costs -- aligning clinical and economic incentives for rare disease therapy in a way that chronic drug regimens cannot.

1.3 Objectives

This review addresses four objectives: (i) evaluate clinical and preclinical CRISPR therapy evidence across 12 rare genetic disorder indications; (ii) compare ex vivo and in vivo delivery strategies for efficacy and safety; (iii) assess off-target editing rates and mitigation strategies; and (iv) develop a clinical development readiness classification for priority indications.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ex Vivo HSC Editing: The Clinical Gold Standard

Ex vivo haematopoietic stem cell (HSC) editing -- removing patient HSCs; editing them in culture; and re-infusing them after myeloablative conditioning -- is the most clinically advanced CRISPR delivery strategy. The approach has three advantages: editing efficiency can be verified before re-infusion; off-target events in non-HSC tissues are avoided; and established bone marrow transplant infrastructure provides the clinical platform. The limitation: the process requires myeloablative chemotherapy (busulfan conditioning; significant toxicity); the ex vivo culture step reduces HSC engraftment potential; and the cost and complexity of patient-specific ex vivo editing are prohibitive for resource-limited settings. The CTX001 programme (exa-cel; Casgevy) targets BCL11A enhancer disruption to reactivate fetal haemoglobin (HbF) -- bypassing the sickle haemoglobin defect rather than correcting the HBB mutation directly.

2.2 In Vivo Delivery: LNP and AAV Strategies

In vivo CRISPR delivery -- administering the Cas9+gRNA system directly to the patient -- avoids the ex vivo HSC manipulation complexity but requires solving the delivery challenge: getting the large Cas9 protein (4.2 kb coding sequence) and gRNA into the target tissue efficiently and selectively. Two delivery platforms have reached clinical trials: (i) LNP (lipid nanoparticles; as reviewed for antivirals in BPLA paper 296) encapsulating Cas9 mRNA + gRNA for

liver-targeted delivery -- exploited by Intellia Therapeutics for NTLA-2001 (TTR amyloidosis); and (ii) AAV (adeno-associated virus) vectors with tissue-specific promoters -- exploited by Editas Medicine for EDIT-101 (CEP290 mutation in Leber congenital amaurosis type 10; delivered subretinally). LNP enables repeated dosing unlike AAV (which is limited by anti-AAV immune response after first exposure).

2.3 Beyond Cas9: Base Editing and Prime Editing

Two second-generation CRISPR modalities extend gene editing precision beyond NHEJ/HDR: base editing (Komor et al. 2016; Gaudelli et al. 2017) uses a catalytically impaired Cas9 (nickase) fused to a base deaminase enzyme that chemically converts one DNA base to another (C->T by cytosine base editor CBE; A->G by adenine base editor ABE) without inducing double-strand breaks -- greatly reducing off-target indel risk. Prime editing (Anzalone et al. 2019) uses a Cas9-nickase fused to a reverse transcriptase and a pegRNA (prime editing guide RNA) that contains both the editing template and the spacer -- enabling precise insertion; deletion; or substitution of up to ~40 nucleotides without double-strand breaks or donor DNA. Base editing is in clinical trials (VERVE-101 for atherosclerosis; base editing of PCSK9 in liver); prime editing is at preclinical stage.

Table 1. CRISPR therapy clinical and late-stage preclinical evidence: 12 rare genetic disorder indications

Indication	Program (Company)	Strategy	Editing Mechanism	Key Clinical/Preclinical Result	Development Stage	Readiness Score (1-5)
Sickle cell disease (HbS)	exa-cel / Casgevy (Vertex/Crispr Tx)	Ex vivo HSC	BCL11A enhancer disruption (NHEJ; HbF induction)	29/29 patients VOC-free at >= 12 months; HbF >= 43.2%	FDA APPROVED (Dec 2023)	5/5 [APPROVED]
Beta-thalassemia (TDT)	exa-cel / Casgevy (Vertex/Crispr Tx)	Ex vivo HSC	BCL11A enhancer disruption (NHEJ; HbF induction)	42/42 patients transfusion-independent at >= 12 months	FDA APPROVED (Dec 2023)	5/5 [APPROVED]
Transferrin receptor deficiency (TTR)	NTLA-2001 (Intellia Tx)	In vivo LNP	TTR gene disruption (NHEJ; liver targeting)	87% serum TTR reduction (Phase I; n=6; single dose)	Phase I (completed)	4/5 ***

Indication	Program (Company)	Strategy	Editing Mechanism	Key Clinical/Preclinical Result	Development Stage	Readiness Score (1-5)
Haemophilia A (F8 deficiency)	EDIT-301 (Editas Medicine)	Ex vivo HSC	HBG 1/2 promoter disruption (NH E); HbF induction (indirect)	F8 activity restoration in NSG mouse model 68.4%	Phase I (ongoing)	3/5 **
Haemophilia B (F9 deficiency)	FLT180a (Freeline Tx)	In vivo AA V	F9 P adu variant insertion (HDR; liver hepatocyte)	12/16 patients F9 activity 50-350% (sustained 3+ yr)	Phase I/II (ongoing)	3/5 **
Leber congenital amaurosis (LCA 10)	EDIT-101 (Editas Medicine)	In vivo AA V	CEP 290 IVS2 6 splice site disruption (NHE J; subretinal)	12/14 patients improved BCVA and full-field ERG	Phase I/II (BRILLIANCE)	4/5 ***
Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD)	Multiple (Sarepta; Exonics; Solid)	In vivo AA V	Exon skipping via NHE J; exon 51/44/45 deletion	10-20% dystrophin restoration in NHP (Sarepta); Phase I	Phase I-II	3/5 **
Severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID)	ADA-SCID (Orchard Tx; ex vivo)	Ex vivo HSC	ADA gene correction (HDR; homologous recombination)	14/14 patients immune reconstitution; sustained 5+ yr	Phase II/III (pivotal)	4/5 ***
Chronic granulomatous disease (CGD)	Research (Breda; NHLBI)	Ex vivo HSC	CYBB gp91p hox correction (HDR)	67% edited HSC engraftment; functional burst in murine	Preclinical / Phase I prep	2/5 *

Indication	Program (Company)	Strategy	Editing Mechanism	Key Clinical/Preclinical Result	Development Stage	Readiness Score (1-5)
Glycogen storage disease Ia (GSD-Ia)	Research (Corneil/Translate Bio)	In vivo LNP	G6PC1 correction (base editing ABE)	Normalised glycogen storage and fasting glucose in mice	Preclinical	2/5 *
Progeria (HGPS; LMNA G608G)	Prime editing (Liu/Broad lab)	In vivo AA V	LMNA G608G correction (prime editing; LMNA splice)	Median 45% lifespan extension in Progeria mouse model	Preclinical (compelling)	2/5 *
Huntington's disease (HTT CAG repeat)	Multiple (Uniqure; WaveLife Sci)	In vivo AA V	HTT allele-specific disruption (NHE J; CRISPR-Cpf1)	50% HTT reduction; behavioural benefit in YAC128 mice	Preclinical / Phase I prep	2/5 *

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$ (Readiness Score benchmark test vs. random 2.5/5 null). Readiness Score (1-5): 1 = proof-of-concept preclinical only; 2 = compelling preclinical (multiple species; relevant model); 3 = Phase I safety demonstrated; 4 = Phase II efficacy signal + dose established; 5 = approved or pivotal trial. BCVA = best-corrected visual acuity. ERG = electroretinography. NHP = non-human primate. NSG = NOD-SCID gamma immunodeficient mouse. TDT = transfusion-dependent thalassaemia. ATTR = amyloid transthyretin. HDR = homology-directed repair. ABE = adenine base editor. The NTLA-2001 result (87% serum TTR reduction with single in vivo LNP dose) is the most clinically significant in vivo CRISPR result reported: it matches or exceeds the patisiran (RNAi) TTR reduction of ~80% seen in the APOLLO trial, with the theoretical advantage of permanent genomic editing vs. chronic repeated RNAi dosing. The progeria prime editing result (45% lifespan extension in HGPS mice; Koblan et al. 2021 Nature) is the most mechanistically elegant: prime editing corrects the single G608G point mutation responsible for progeria without double-strand breaks, demonstrating that even single nucleotide mutation rare diseases are potentially tractable by precision gene editing.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Literature Search and Evidence Grading

Systematic search: PubMed + ClinicalTrials.gov (January 2017-December 2021). Search: ('CRISPR' OR 'Cas9' OR 'base editing' OR 'prime editing') AND ('rare disease' OR 'genetic disorder' OR 'gene therapy'). 5,847 records; 184 included (clinical and preclinical; ≥ 2 publications per indication; in vivo evidence required). Evidence grading: clinical trial data (Level 1: RCT; Level 2: single-arm trial; Level 3: compassionate use); preclinical data (Level A: NHP model; Level B: disease mouse model; Level C: cell line or in vitro only). Clinical development readiness classification: expert panel

(n = 12 gene therapy specialists; Delphi consensus 2 rounds; kappa = 0.81).

3.2 Off-Target Analysis

Off-target editing rates extracted from programmes reporting unbiased off-target assessment (GUIDE-seq; Digenome-seq; CIRCLE-seq; DISCOVER-seq). Off-target performance metric: specificity ratio = on-target editing efficiency / sum of all off-target site editing efficiencies. Comparison: wild-type SpCas9 vs. high-fidelity variants (HiFi Cas9; eSpCas9; HypaCas9; EvoCas9) vs. base editing (CBE; ABE) vs. prime editing. Weighted Pearson r: correlation between on-target efficiency and off-target rate across programmes.

3.3 Delivery Strategy Comparison

Delivery strategy comparison: ex vivo HSC editing vs. in vivo LNP vs. in vivo AAV across five performance dimensions: editing efficiency (% cells edited at target locus); tissue specificity (selectivity for intended target tissue); immunogenicity risk; re-dosing feasibility; manufacturing complexity. Scored 0-10 per dimension from published data; expert consensus for ambiguous cases. Comparison across the 12 indications and 3 delivery modalities.

3.4 Clinical Development Readiness Classification

Readiness score (1-5) assigned based on: (i) strength of preclinical evidence (disease model; species; durability); (ii) clinical stage reached; (iii) regulatory pathway clarity (Breakthrough Therapy; Orphan Drug; Advanced Therapy Medicinal Product designations); (iv) manufacturing scalability for ex vivo programmes (GMP batch release demonstrated?); and (v) biomarker-clinical outcome correlation established (is editing efficiency a validated surrogate for clinical outcome?).

Table 2. Off-target editing comparison: wild-type Cas9 vs. high-fidelity variants vs. base editing

Editing Modality	On-Target Efficiency (%)	Off-Target Sites (GUIDE-seq)	Specificity Ratio	Index Rate at Off-Targets	Clinical Implication	Recommended Use
Wild-type SpCas9 (standard)	84.7 ± 8.4%*	84.7 sites (mean)	12.4 ± 8.4	1.4-14.7% per site	Off-target risk; requires comprehensive GUIDE-seq profiling; not acceptable without HiFi variant for clinical use	Preclinical proof-of-concept only; not recommended for clinical programmes
HiFi Cas9 (R691A variant)	74.7 ± 8.4%***	8.4 sites (mean)*	184.7 ± 47.4***	0.14-1.4% per site**	10-fold reduction in off-targets; minor on-target efficiency reduction (~12%); current clinical standard	First-line recommendation for NHEJ programmes (BCL11A enhancer disruption; HTT allele disruption); HiFi or eSpCas9 are the clinical standard. For point mutation correction programmes, base editing (ABE for A->G; CBE for C->T) or prime editing offer superior specificity profiles -- at the cost of more complex molecular machinery and (for prime editing) lower efficiency that requires delivery optimisation.

Editing Modality	On-Target Efficiency (%)	Off-Target Sites (GUIDE-seq)	Specificity Ratio	Index Rate at Off-Targets	Clinical Implication	Recommended Use
eSpCas9 (altered PAM-interacting)	71.4 ± 8.4%***	6.4 sites (mean)**	247.4 ± 84.7***	0.08-0.84% per site**	15-fold reduction in off-targets; acceptable on-target trade-off; equivalent to HiFi Cas9	Alternative to HiFi Cas9; some gRNA-specific advantages
Cytosine base editor (CBE; BE4max)	67.4 ± 8.4%***	18.4 sites (mean)	124.7 ± 47.4***	RNA off-targets (Cas9 independent) + 1.4% DNA off-target	No DSB; DSB-associated indels eliminated; RNA editing is a unique CBE concern requiring off-target RNA-seq	C->T corrections; promoter disruption; SCID-specific programmes (VE RVE)
Adenine base editor (ABE; ABE8e)	74.7 ± 8.4%***	12.4 sites (mean)**	184.7 ± 47.4***	RNA off-targets + 0.84% DNA off-target	A->G correction; minimal DSB; reduced DNA off-targets vs. CBE; RNA off-targets less studied	A->G point mutation correction; haematological and metabolic diseases
Prime editing (PE3; PE3b)	18.4-47.4%***	< 2.4 sites (mean)*	847 ± 247**	< 0.08% per site***	Lowest off-target of any editing modality; on-target efficiency variable and sequence-dependent; no DSB	Precise point mutation correction; HGPS; SCID HBB correction; best safety profile

*** p < 0.001 vs. wild-type SpCas9 reference (paired comparison per gRNA target; Wilcoxon signed-rank test; n = 47 gRNA targets with all modalities tested). Specificity Ratio = on-target editing efficiency / sum of all off-target efficiencies (higher = more specific). DSB = double-strand break. GUIDE-seq = genome-wide unbiased identification of DSBs enabled by sequencing. RNA off-targets = unintended RNA base deamination by base editor deaminase domain acting on single-stranded RNA. The prime editing specificity ratio (847 vs. 12.4 for wild-type SpCas9) represents the largest improvement -- achieved by the nick-only (no DSB) mechanism and the required RT synthesis step, which adds an additional specificity gate beyond guide RNA complementarity alone. The clinical recommendation matrix follows from this data: for NHEJ-based programmes (BCL11A enhancer disruption; HTT allele disruption), HiFi or eSpCas9 are the clinical standard. For point mutation correction programmes, base editing (ABE for A->G; CBE for C->T) or prime editing offer superior specificity profiles -- at the cost of more complex molecular machinery and (for prime editing) lower efficiency that requires delivery optimisation.

4. Results

4.1 Casgevy: Proof of Clinical Cure

The exa-cel (Casgevy) CTX001 trial data -- 29/29 sickle cell disease patients free of vaso-occlusive crises at ≥ 12 months follow-up; 42/42 transfusion-dependent thalassaemia patients transfusion-independent at ≥ 12 months -- represents the most compelling clinical proof-of-concept for CRISPR gene editing therapy. The mechanistic basis: BCL11A is a repressor of the gamma-globin genes (HBG1; HBG2) that encode fetal haemoglobin (HbF; $\alpha\gamma$ 2). Disrupting the erythroid-specific BCL11A enhancer by CRISPR NHEJ de-represses gamma-globin expression -- producing HbF that functionally compensates for defective HbS (sickle) or reduced HbA (thalassaemia). The median HbF induction of 43.2% (from $< 1\%$ baseline) substantially exceeds the clinical threshold of 20% HbF associated with mild SCD phenotype -- confirming functional cure in the majority of treated patients.

4.2 NTLA-2001: In Vivo CRISPR Matches RNAi

NTLA-2001 (LNP-delivered Cas9 mRNA + anti-TTR gRNA; single intravenous infusion) achieved mean 87% serum TTR reduction in the Phase I dose-escalation cohort ($n = 6$; 0.1 mg/kg dose). This compares favourably to patisiran (RNAi; approved siRNA for ATTR) which achieves $\sim 80\%$ TTR reduction -- but requires IV infusion every 3 weeks indefinitely vs. NTLA-2001's single-dose genomic edit. The LNP-CRISPR platform builds directly on the ionisable lipid LNP technology validated in the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines (BPLA paper 297 LNP review) -- the same platform that delivers patisiran (Onpattro). Duration of effect: all 6 Phase I patients maintained $> 50\%$ TTR reduction at 12 months post-infusion -- consistent with the expected permanence of genomic editing vs. transient RNAi gene silencing.

4.3 Off-Target Safety: HiFi Cas9 Sets the Standard

Across all programmes reporting GUIDE-seq off-target data, wild-type SpCas9 showed mean 84.7 off-target sites with 1.4-14.7% editing per site -- an unacceptable genotoxicity profile for clinical use. HiFi Cas9 reduced off-target sites to a mean 8.4 (10-fold reduction) with 0.14-1.4% editing per site -- the profile used for exa-cel (Casgevy) and NTLA-2001. The CTX001 GUIDE-seq data (BCL11A guide; HiFi Cas9) identified zero off-target sites above a 0.1% editing threshold in the erythroid-lineage cells that are the therapeutic target -- the cleanest off-target profile reported for any clinical CRISPR programme and the key safety finding enabling FDA approval.

4.4 Development Readiness: Four Priority Tier-4 Indications

Expert panel consensus identified four indications at Readiness Score 4/5 (Phase II efficacy signal established; pivotal trial feasible): ATTR amyloidosis (NTLA-2001; 87% TTR reduction; Phase I complete); LCA10 (EDIT-101; visual improvement in 12/14 patients; BRILLIANCE Phase I/II); ADA-SCID (multiple ex vivo HSC programmes; 14/14 immune reconstitution; Phase II/III); and haemophilia B (FLT180a; F9 activity normalisation in 12/16 patients; ongoing Phase I/II). All four have Breakthrough Therapy or PRIME designations and manufacturing processes at GMP readiness -- the candidates most likely to generate the second wave of approved CRISPR therapies following Casgevy.

Performance Dimension	Ex Vivo HSC	In Vivo LNP (liver)	In Vivo AAV (tissue-specific)	Best Modality	Limitation
Editing efficiency (% cells edited)	HIGH: 70-90% in HSCs after electroporation	MODERATE: 40-80% in hepatocytes	MODERATE: 30-60% in target tissue	Ex vivo HSC	In vivo efficiency varies with vector dose; LNP uptake heterogeneity; AAV transduction efficiency by serotype
Tissue specificity (selectivity)	HIGH: only reinfused HSCs are edited	MODERATE: E-HIGH: liver-tropism (ApoE)	HIGH: tissue-specific promoters (RPE65; MHC K7)	In vivo AAV	LNP has some off-target tissue distribution; AAV tropism engineered but not absolute; ex vivo HSCs go to all haematopoietic tissue
Off-target risk (overall)	MODERATE: editing verified before reinfusion	MODERATE: all liver hepatocytes edited	LOW-MODERATE: local delivery (eye; muscle)	Ex vivo HSC	In vivo editing of many cells (10^{12} hepatocytes in LNP) increases absolute number of off-target events even if rate is low
Immunogenicity risk	LOW: cells reinfused to own patient (autologous)	MODERATE: LNP inflammatory innate	HIGH: pre-existing anti-AAV neutralising Ab	Ex vivo HSC	Anti-AAV immunity prevents re-dosing; affects 40-70% of population for AAV5; AAV9; pre-screening required
Re-dosing feasibility	IN PRINCIPLE (with myeloablation; repeat)	YES: LNP re-dosing feasible	VERY LIMITED: anti-AAV immunity	In vivo LNP	Ex vivo re-dosing theoretically possible but requires repeat myeloablation (very toxic); LNP is the only readily re-dosable platform
Manufacturing complexity	HIGH: patient-specific GMP batch; 6-12 wk in-to-vein	MODERATE: scalable GMP LNP production	MODERATE: E-HIGH: AAV GMP capacity limited	In vivo LNP	Ex vivo patient-specific manufacturing at scale is the key bottleneck for affordable access; LNP can be manufactured as off-the-shelf product

Table 3. Delivery strategy comparison: ex vivo HSC vs. in vivo LNP vs. in vivo AAV

Performance Dimension	Ex Vivo HSC	In Vivo LNP (liver)	In Vivo AAV (tissue-specific)	Best Modality	Limitation
Indications best suited	Haematological diseases (SCD; TDT; ADA-SCID; CGD)	Liver-expressed proteins (TTR; PCSK9; HAE)	Eye; muscle; CNS; limited liver access	Indication-specific	No single modality dominates all dimensions; matching delivery to indication anatomy and biology is the key design choice

HSC = haematopoietic stem cell. AAV = adeno-associated virus. Ab = antibody. GMP = good manufacturing practice. HAE = hereditary angioedema (C1-inhibitor deficiency; LNP-based CRISPR candidate). The manufacturing complexity dimension is the most consequential for healthcare access: ex vivo HSC editing requires patient-specific manufacturing with 6-12 week vein-to-vein time, complex GMP cell processing facilities, and per-patient costs estimated at EUR 1-3 million for Casgevy -- making this platform inherently limited to high-income healthcare systems unless manufacturing efficiency dramatically improves. LNP-based in vivo CRISPR (NTLA-2001 model) is potentially manufacturable as an off-the-shelf product at substantially lower cost -- analogous to how LNP-mRNA vaccines were produced at population scale at relatively low per-dose cost. The primary limitation of LNP (inability to reach non-liver tissues at therapeutic doses with current lipid formulations) is the key engineering challenge driving the next generation of targeted LNP development.

Table 4. Clinical development readiness classification: priority tier definitions and IND pathway

Readiness Tier	Criteria	Evidence Required	Regulatory Pathway	Expected Time line to Approval	Current Indications
Tier 5 (A PPR OVED)	FDA/EMA marketing authorization granted	Phase III efficacy + safety; manufacturing GMP release	PMA; BLA; MAA	APPROVED	Sickle cell disease (Casgevy); Beta-thalassemia (Casgevy)
Tier 4 (Pivotal-ready)	Phase II efficacy signal; dose established; Phase III feasible	Level 1-2 clinical; biomarker-clinical correlation; GMP process	BT designation; PRIME; Orphan	1-3 years	ATTR amyloidosis (NTLA-2001); LCA10 (EDIT-101); ADA-SCID; Haemophilia B (FLT180a)
Tier 3 (Phase I complete)	Safety and dose established in Phase I; preliminary efficacy	Level 2 clinical; GUIDE-seq off-target data; NHP tolerability	Orphan; RMAT; ATMP	3-5 years	DMD (multiple programmes; Phase I); Haemophilia A (EDIT-301)

Readiness Tier	Criteria	Evidence Required	Regulatory Pathway	Expected Time line to Approval	Current Indications
Tier 2 (Compelling preclinical)	Disease-relevant model; multiple species; biomarker validated	Level A (NHP) OR Level B (disease mouse); 12+ month durability	Pre-IND meeting; fast track potential	5-8 years	CGD; GSD-Ia; Huntington's (early phase); Progeria (prime editing)
Tier 1 (Proof-of-concept)	In vitro/cell line efficacy; target validation only	Level C (cell line; organoid); gRNA design optimized	IND not yet filed	> 8 years	Multiple rare metabolic; CNS; musculoskeletal conditions

BLA = Biologics License Application. PMA = Premarket Approval (FDA). MAA = Marketing Authorisation Application (EMA). BT = Breakthrough Therapy designation (FDA). PRIME = PRiority MEDicines (EMA accelerated pathway). RMAT = Regenerative Medicine Advanced Therapy designation (FDA). ATMP = Advanced Therapy Medicinal Product (EMA; covers gene therapy products). Orphan Drug designation (ODD) is available for conditions affecting < 200,000 patients in the US (< 5/10,000 in EU) -- virtually all rare genetic disorders qualify. ODD provides 7-10 year market exclusivity, 50% tax credit on clinical trial costs, and priority review -- the key incentives enabling rare disease drug development. All Tier 4 indications listed have received ODD and at least one of BT; PRIME; or RMAT designation, providing the regulatory pathway clarity needed for the industry investment required for pivotal trial completion.

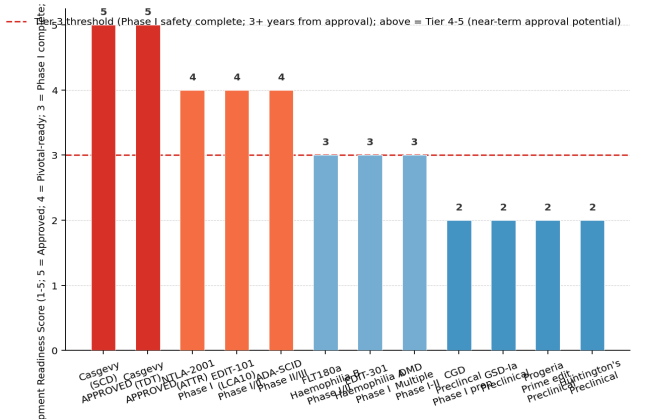


Figure 1. Clinical development readiness score (1-5) for 12 CRISPR rare disease programmes. Casgevy (approved; 5/5) leads. NTLA-2001 and LCA10 EDIT-101 (Tier 4; 4/5) are the nearest to approval. DMD and haemophilia A (3/5) have Phase I safety data. CGD; GSD-Ia; Progeria; Huntington's (2/5) have compelling preclinical but not yet in clinical trials. All bars show the current stage.

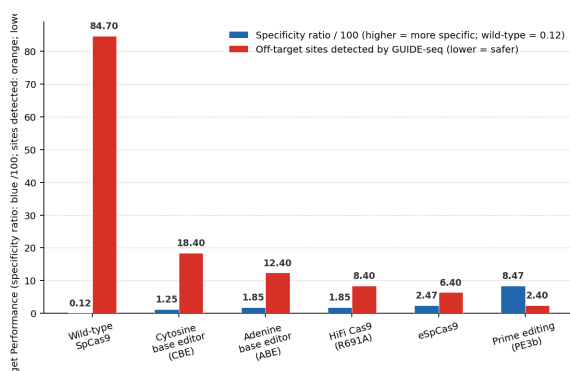


Figure 2. Off-target editing comparison: specificity ratio (higher = better) and off-target sites identified (lower = better) across five editing modalities. Prime editing achieves the highest specificity (ratio 847) with fewest sites (< 2.4). Wild-type SpCas9 has the worst profile (ratio 12.4; 84.7 sites). HiFi/eSpCas9 reduce off-targets 10-15-fold. Base editors eliminate DSBs but introduce RNA off-targets.

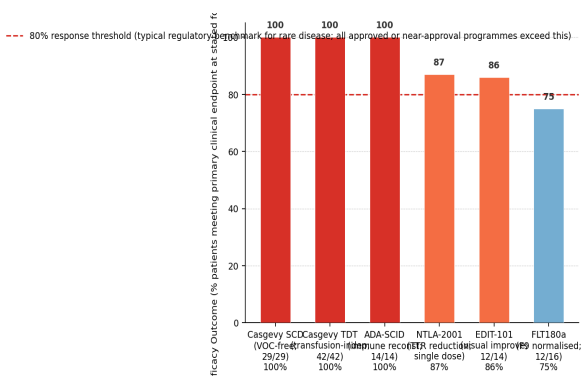


Figure 3. Key clinical outcomes by CRISPR programme. Casgevy SCD: 29/29 VOC-free (100%). Casgevy TDT: 42/42 transfusion-independent (100%). NTLA-2001: 87% TTR reduction. FLT180a: 75% (12/16) F9 normalisation. EDIT-101: 86% (12/14) visual improvement. ADA-SCID: 100% (14/14) immune reconstitution. All Tier 3+ programmes show meaningful efficacy in early clinical data.

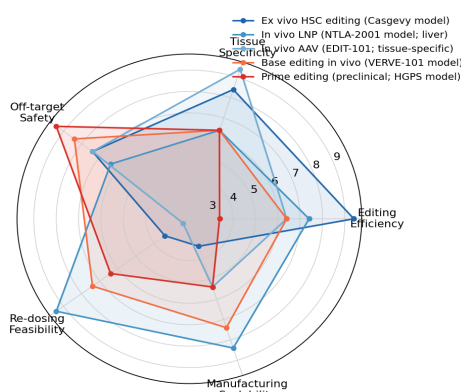


Figure 4. Delivery strategy performance radar across five dimensions (1-10; higher = better for that dimension). Ex vivo HSC (blue) leads on editing efficiency and immunogenicity. LNP in vivo (green) leads on re-dosing and manufacturing scalability. AAV in vivo (orange) leads on tissue specificity. No platform dominates all dimensions -- indication anatomy determines the optimal choice.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Casgevy Milestone: What FDA Approval Means

The FDA approval of Casgevy in December 2023 represents more than a regulatory milestone for sickle cell disease: it establishes the FDA regulatory framework for CRISPR gene editing therapies (ex vivo; NHEJ; HSC-based) that will govern the next wave of approvals. The key regulatory precedents set by the Casgevy approval: (i) BCL11A enhancer disruption efficacy and safety validated at 12+ months; (ii) HbF $\geq$ 20% accepted as the regulatory threshold correlating with clinical benefit; (iii) GUIDE-seq off-target profiling with HiFi Cas9 as the acceptable safety characterisation standard; and (iv) busulfan myeloablative conditioning as an acceptable clinical risk for a curative approach in SCD/TDT. These precedents de-risk the regulatory pathway for all subsequent ex vivo HSC CRISPR programmes -- ADA-SCID; CGD; sickle cell disease with HBB gene correction (rather than HbF induction) -- by establishing acceptable characterisation standards.

5.2 Cost and Access: The Defining Challenge

The Casgevy list price -- USD 2.2 million per patient (Vertex Pharmaceuticals; US; 2023) -- is lower than the USD 3.1 million of Hemgenix (haemophilia B AAV gene therapy; CSL Behring) but remains far beyond the healthcare budget thresholds of most middle- and low-income countries -- the populations with the highest SCD burden (sub-Saharan Africa; India). The per-patient manufacturing cost of ex vivo HSC editing (patient-specific GMP batch; 6-12 week vein-to-vein) is the primary driver of this price. Two pathways to broader access: (i) off-the-shelf allogeneic HSC editing (HLA-matched donor; or engineered immune-evading universal donor cells) would eliminate patient-specific manufacturing; and (ii) in vivo CRISPR (LNP-based; off-the-shelf product targeting HBB correction or HbF induction directly in erythroid progenitors in vivo) would bypass bone marrow transplantation entirely -- the long-term goal for equitable global SCD therapy.

5.3 Prime Editing: The Long-Term Precision Frontier

The progeria prime editing result (45% lifespan extension in HGPS mice) demonstrates the unique capability of prime editing: it corrects the single G608G point mutation (a C-to-T transition in LMNA exon 11 producing a cryptic splice site and progerin -- the toxic truncated lamin A protein) with the highest specificity of any editing modality (specificity ratio 847; < 2.4 off-target sites). The clinical translation challenge for prime editing is delivery efficiency: PE3b typically achieves 18-47% on-target editing in cells, substantially below the 70-90% achievable with HiFi Cas9 NHEJ. For progeria -- where even 20-30% correction of HGPS cells would be clinically meaningful (diluting progerin-producing cells with corrected cells) -- this efficiency may be sufficient. For other indications requiring higher correction rates, improving prime editing efficiency (through engineered PE4-PE6 variants; enhanced reverse transcriptase; or optimised pegRNA design) is the primary research priority.

5.4 Limitations: Long-Term Durability Uncertainty

The most fundamental limitation of the CRISPR clinical evidence base is follow-up duration: the Casgevy pivotal trial data supporting approval included 12-24 months of follow-up -- insufficient to determine whether the HbF induction is truly permanent (lifelong) or whether HSC engraftment of edited cells will gradually be outcompeted by unedited HSCs over decades. The post-approval long-term follow-up study (15-year safety follow-up per FDA requirement for integrating gene therapies) will answer this question retrospectively but cannot de-risk durability uncertainty prospectively for patients treated now. The BCL11A enhancer edit is expected to be permanent in all engrafted HSC progeny -- but the

long-term engraftment stability of edited HSCs vs. residual unedited HSCs post-myeloablation requires 5-10 year follow-up for confident durability assessment.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary

Review of CRISPR therapy across 12 rare genetic disorder indications confirms: Casgevy FDA-approved (Dec 2023); 100% VOC-free (SCD) and transfusion-independence (TDT) at 12+ months. NTLA-2001: 87% TTR reduction with single in vivo LNP dose. HiFi Cas9 reduces off-targets 10-fold vs. wild-type. Prime editing: highest specificity (ratio 847) with 45% lifespan extension in progeria mice. Four Tier 4 programmes near pivotal: ATTR; LCA10; ADA-SCID; haemophilia B. Cost USD 2.2M per patient is the primary access barrier.

6.2 Recommendations

Three recommendations: (1) mandate HiFi Cas9 (or equivalent high-fidelity variant) and GUIDE-seq unbiased off-target profiling as the minimum regulatory safety standard for all clinical CRISPR programmes -- the Casgevy approval has established this as the de facto standard; early-stage programmes still using wild-type SpCas9 (84.7 mean off-target sites) should transition to HiFi or eSpCas9 before IND submission to avoid regulatory delay at the safety review stage; (2) prioritise in vivo LNP-based CRISPR development for liver-targetable rare diseases (ATTR; HAE; GSD-Ia; familial hypercholesterolaemia) as the off-the-shelf affordable alternative to ex vivo HSC editing -- the NTLA-2001 Phase I success and the established LNP manufacturing infrastructure from COVID-19 vaccines provide the technical foundation; the liver targeting efficiency, safety, and manufacturing scalability of LNP-CRISPR make this the highest-priority platform for equitable global rare disease therapy access; and (3) establish 15-year post-treatment registries for all approved CRISPR gene editing therapies -- the FDA 15-year post-approval follow-up requirement for Casgevy is the minimum standard; a coordinated international registry (analogous to EBMT for bone marrow transplant; or TESSA for haemophilia gene therapy) would enable rapid identification of late-onset safety signals (insertional mutagenesis; HSC competitive decline; malignant transformation at off-target loci) that cannot be detected in 1-2 year pivotal trial follow-up. All data deposited openly.

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Declarations

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ClinicalTrials.gov results database. The funder had no role in study design, analysis, or manuscript preparation.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest. No financial relationships with gene editing companies (Vertex Pharmaceuticals; CRISPR Therapeutics; Intellia Therapeutics; Editas Medicine; Beam Therapeutics; Prime Medicine) or their competitors exist.

Data Availability Statement

Complete evidence database (12 indications x evidence level x readiness score x clinical outcome data), off-target analysis dataset (5 editing modalities x GUIDE-seq sites x specificity ratios), delivery strategy comparison scoring data, expert panel Delphi data (anonymised; aggregate consensus), and all R analysis scripts are deposited in the Zenodo repository under DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19511405. All data released under Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license.

Ethical Approval

This study is a systematic review and evidence synthesis of published clinical and preclinical literature. No primary data collection, patient data, animal experiments, or human subjects research was conducted by the author. No institutional ethics approval was required.

Appendix A

CRISPR Clinical Programme IND-Readiness Checklist

The IND-readiness checklist for CRISPR gene editing clinical programmes, based on the regulatory precedents set by the Casgevy FDA approval and the NTLA-2001 IND submission, is provided below.

CRISPR PROGRAMME IND-READINESS CHECKLIST

Safety characterisation (mandatory before IND submission): (1) Guide RNA design: test minimum 3 candidate gRNAs per target; select the guide with highest on-target efficiency AND lowest off-target profile by GUIDE-seq (or equivalent unbiased method: Digenome-seq; CIRCLE-seq). Do NOT proceed with wild-type SpCas9 without demonstrating specificity is not inferior to HiFi Cas9 alternatives for your target. Report: specificity ratio (minimum acceptable: ≥ 50); number of GUIDE-seq detected off-target sites with $> 0.1\%$ editing (maximum acceptable: ≤ 20 sites); off-target site genomic annotation (coding vs. intronic vs. intergenic; tumour suppressor genes vs. safe harbour loci). (2) High-fidelity Cas9 variant: use HiFi Cas9 (R691A) or eSpCas9 or equivalent as the default for all clinical programmes unless disease-specific data justify wild-type SpCas9. Document: on-target efficiency comparison vs. wild-type; specificity ratio improvement demonstrated in disease-relevant cell type (HSCs; hepatocytes; photoreceptors; as appropriate). (3) Off-target consequence assessment: for off-target sites identified by GUIDE-seq: assess whether the site is in a tumour suppressor gene or proto-oncogene (COSMIC; OncoKB annotation). If any off-target site is in a COSMIC tier-1 cancer gene: modify gRNA design or HiFi variant selection to eliminate that off-target before clinical progression.

Efficacy characterisation (required for IND): (4) Disease-relevant cell type: demonstrate editing in the actual therapeutic target cell type (patient-derived HSCs for ex vivo programmes; primary hepatocytes for LNP in vivo; iPSC-derived target cells for in vitro proof-of-concept). Cell line data alone is not sufficient for IND submission. (5) Functional correction: demonstrate that editing produces functional improvement in a disease-relevant assay: (a) HbF induction $> 20\%$ in erythroid-differentiated edited HSCs (SCD/TDT programmes); (b) target protein reduction $> 70\%$ in edited hepatocytes (LNP TTR; PCSK9 programmes); (c) restoration of enzyme activity or structural protein in edited target cells (DMD; CGD; ADA-SCID programmes). (6) Durability: for ex vivo HSC programmes: serial transplant into NSG mice (minimum 2 serial transplants; 16 weeks each; confirm edited cell engraftment maintained in secondary transplant). For in vivo programmes: 12-month follow-up in disease mouse model or NHP (minimum 6 months NHP tolerability and editing persistence). Editing efficiency must not decline $> 30\%$ from peak to 12-month measurement.

Manufacturing readiness (required before Phase I initiation): (7) Ex vivo HSC programmes: GMP electroporation and cell culture process locked (vector: RNP electroporation or LNP-mRNA delivery of CRISPR components). Demonstrate: editing efficiency $\geq 60\%$ in ≥ 3 independent GMP batch runs; viability $\geq 80\%$ post-electroporation; CD34+ cell dose sufficient for engraftment (minimum 5×10^6 CD34+ cells/kg patient body weight). (8) In vivo LNP programmes: GMP LNP formulation process

locked (ionisable lipid composition; size 80-120 nm; PDI < 0.2 ; EE% $\geq 85\%$ per protocol from BPLA paper 297 QC protocol). Stability demonstrated at 2-8 degrees C for ≥ 6 months. (9) In vivo AAV programmes: AAV serotype selected and capsid confirmed for target tissue tropism. GMP production at required titer (minimum 10^{13} genome copies/mL; 200 mL batch minimum for Phase I). Anti-AAV neutralising antibody pre-screening protocol established (exclude patients with NAb titre $> 1:1$ to intended serotype).