



Merger Updates

April 2025

Message From the CEOs

As we move forward on our merger journey, our dedication remains the same—our commitment to those we support is at the core of everything we do.

At Hammer & NER, we have long recognized the growing needs of our aging populations. Living Well specializes in high-needs care, an area Hammer & NER wants to strengthen. Hammer & NER excels at serving more independent individuals, an area Living Well would like to strengthen. A merger allows both organizations to enhance services efficiently while reducing administrative costs, streamlining systems, and increasing our influence with legislators. Most importantly, it creates more opportunities for those we serve and our employees. Community is central to our mission, and together, we can make an even greater impact. Thank you for being part of our journey.



John Estrem, CEO, Hammer & NER

Tom Gillespie, CEO, Living Well Disability Services

Hammer & NER and Living Well Disability Services: A Journey to Become One Organization

The Hammer & NER and Living Well Disability Services (Living Well) Board of Directors met at the White Bear Lake Office on January 14, 2025 and signed a Term Sheet Agreement for a proposed merger of our two organizations. Signers were Board Secretaries Frances (Fran) McCloskey (on the left) from the Living

Well Board and Laurie Moga from the Hammer & NER Board. The agreement states that the Board of Directors of Hammer & NER and Living Well Disability Services have entered into a formal partnership agreement. The intent of the partnership is to combine our expertise, experience and resources to create an innovative and sustainable organization that provides exceptional support to people with disabilities throughout their lifetime.



(Pictured below are Board members and CEOs from both organizations)



Frequently Asked Questions

We wanted to share some of the information that we know at this time around the proposed merger of Hammer & NER and Living Well Disability Services. We will continue to send out merger update communication each month to keep you informed.

Q. What is happening between Hammer & NER and Living Well Disability Services?

A. Hammer & NER and Living Well Disability Services have entered into a partnership agreement with the intent to merge into one high-capacity organization. The vision is to expand support for people served with a continuum of living options, from more independent living to providing specialized care for people who are aging and with higher medical needs.

Q. How would a merger of the two organizations impact support for individuals served?

A. The goal of the merger is to improve and expand the quality of dependable care and support for individuals throughout their lifetime through a more comprehensive set of services that meet the shifting needs of the people served.



Q. What is the value in combining the organizations?

A. A merged organization provides the opportunity to expand support for people based on a combination of knowledge and experience. The combination would provide sustainability based on innovation, streamlined operations, and opportunities to increase efficiency.

Q. When would the merger be official?

A. The goal is to complete the merger of Living Well Disability Services and Hammer & NER on January 1, 2026.

Q. How will employees benefit from a combined organization?

A. A larger organization offers more opportunities for selecting locations, various types of housing, and greater potential for career advancement.

Q. Who would lead a combined organization?

A. Tom Gillespie, current CEO of Living Well Disability Services, would lead the new organization. John Estrem, CEO of Hammer & NER will be staying on in 2026 in an executive role.

Merger Work Group Leaders Gather

The leadership group gathered in person at Pinstripes in Edina to share a meal and envision our future as one organization.

We also tested our athletic skills with a few rounds of Bocce Ball, blending team-building with some friendly competition. This Leadership group meets weekly on Teams to discuss and implement on our vision the organization's future.



Left to right: Rod Carlson, Chief Operating Officer, Tom Gillespie, CEO, Living Well, John Estrem, CEO, Hammer & NER, Isaiah Allen, Chief Development Officer, Dan Bottiger, Director of Information Systems, Front Row left to right: Kristin Pyka, CFO, Barbara Brandt, Director of Communication, Alison Nelson, Chief People Officer.

Meet & Greet: Home Visits Reinforce Collaboration

On March 20, the merger Brand & Identity team gathered for lunch and a tour of the Hammer & NER office in Wayzata before visiting two Hammer & NER group homes. During the visits, the team toured the homes, introduced themselves, and spent time with the people they support and staff.

The conversations were lively, with people supported sharing stories of what they love about their home. Kevin, (middle in red shirt) showed us his room he decorated with a Mountain Dew theme, his favorite pop.



The afternoon deepened our connections with the people we support and staff, highlighting the many similarities and shared values

across our organizations. As we continue on our merger journey, we look forward to meeting even more of the people we support and the dedicated staff who make our mission possible.



Human Resources Team Introductions

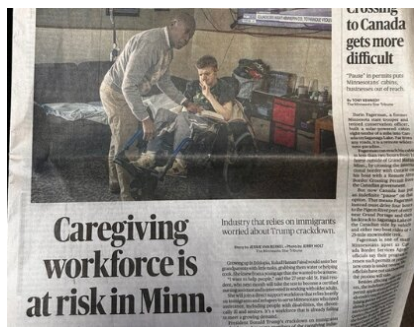
The Human Resources Teams from Hammer & NER and Living Well Disability Services had their first combined team meeting. While this meeting served as mostly introductory for people who had not met; we discussed the vision for the HR Combined Work Group, shared our key characteristics and work streams. As a team we also shared with each other about roles, one thing that is core to who we are, and professional and personal bests. We also spent some time sharing what we are most excited about with the potential for merger and things we were concerned about.

Notably, there was common excitement around collaboration, creating efficiencies, and the opportunities that a combined organization will open for both our employees and the people we serve. This meeting served as a kickoff for future opportunities to work together as a larger team both in smaller groups and larger groups.



*Pictured above: Front Row 1: Teri Lutzke , Kyle Fitzwater, Rachel Southa, Lisa Barker
 Row 2: Nate Altman, Jenni Zeis, Jackson Otto, Sarah Northagen
 Row 3: Cole Strelecki, Autumn Reynolds-Lillibridge, Alison Nelson
 Row 4: Cate Saracen Peters, Jena Joseph, Julie Huffcutt, Sebastian Rydel
 Row 5: Cathy Thoma, Anh Kinzer, Liz Schrul
 Row 6: Jesse Moravec, Stacy Roberts*

In the News Together



Tom Gillespie, CEO + Adolphus Kesseh, Program Manager, as well as Hammer CEO, John Estrem, are all featured. Front page article. Click the button below to read the full story.

[Read the Full Story Here](#)

[Livingwell.org](#)

[Hammer.org](#)

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