



August 24, 2026

Dear Tribal Leader and Urban Indian Organization Leader:

Waq'lis'i. It is an honor to serve as the 12th Director of the Indian Health Service (IHS). I am deeply grateful for the trust placed in me by President Trump and Secretary Kennedy and for the opportunity to continue working in partnership with Tribal Leaders and Urban Indian Organization Leaders to advance the IHS mission of raising the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level.

As the IHS Director, my focus will be advancing resources that demonstrably improve care while honoring the government-to-government relationship between Indian Tribes and the United States. I pledge to remain grounded in the principles of Tribal sovereignty and self-determination. I am committed to strengthening our workforce; improving access to high-quality, culturally appropriate care; modernizing our health care facilities, patient electronic health records, and sanitation infrastructure; and ensuring that Tribal Consultation remains central to our work. I also remain committed to listening to our Tribal partners, fostering transparent communication, and working in true partnership because the strongest and most sustainable solutions are developed through collaboration. These commitments will guide my leadership as the IHS Director and will continue to shape every decision we make, every partnership we build, and every action we take in fulfilling the IHS mission.

In addition to serving as the IHS Director, I have the privilege of continuing to serve as the Senior Advisor to Secretary Kennedy. This unprecedented dual appointment provides greater access to HHS leadership and creates additional opportunities to elevate Tribal perspectives and priorities across the Department while strengthening coordination amongst HHS Operating Divisions whose programs also affect Tribal communities. Most importantly, it supports a more coordinated approach to addressing the priorities that matter the most to Tribal communities, including those priorities that extend beyond the IHS.

While these opportunities strengthen our work across HHS, they are meaningful only because of the dedicated IHS workforce that brings our mission to life every day. I want to express my sincere appreciation to the IHS workforce. Every member of the IHS team plays an essential role in fulfilling our mission and delivering care to our American Indian and Alaska Native relatives. I am grateful for your commitment to service, and I support the workforce that makes our mission possible.

As we look ahead, I also want to acknowledge the leadership that has helped the Agency with continued success and recognize Mr. Clayton Fulton for serving as the IHS Chief of Staff while also serving with the Delegated Authority of the IHS Director. His dedication to the IHS mission has helped guide the Agency during this period, and I am thankful for his service and partnership.

The opportunities before us are significant, and so is our shared responsibility. I am committed to working alongside Tribal Nations, Urban Indian Organizations, HHS leaders, and our federal partners to advance the IHS mission, strengthen our partnerships, and deliver meaningful, lasting improvements in the health and well-being of our American Indian and Alaska Native relatives for generations to come. Sepk'eec'a (Thank you).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mark Cruz', is written over a horizontal line.

Mark Cruz
Director