Senate Confirms Mark Cruz as Director of the Indian Health Service

Category: Policy Blog
written by Jeremy Grabiner | August 7, 2026

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WASHINGTON, D.C. (August 7, 2026)– The National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) applauds the U.S. Senate's confirmation of Mark Cruz (Klamath Tribes) as Director of the Indian Health Service (IHS). The Senate confirmed Mr. Cruz today, following a favorable vote by the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs (SCIA) on July 22, 2026, and a nomination hearing before SCIA on June 24, 2026.

Director Cruz's confirmation ends more than a year without a Senate-confirmed IHS Director, which began when former Director Roselyn Tso (Navajo) resigned at the start of the current administration. NCUIH previously stressed the importance of appointing a permanent IHS Director and called for the elevation of the role to Assistant Secretary. IHS Chief of Staff Clayton Fulton has served in an acting capacity since December 2025.

As IHS Director, Director Cruz will oversee a nationwide health care delivery system serving approximately 2.8 million American Indians and Alaska Natives through the Indian health system. Mr. Cruz will continue to jointly serve as Senior Advisor to HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., where he is one of the highest-ranking Native officials within the Department.

During his confirmation hearing, Director Cruz pledged his commitment to the work ahead, stating: "Tribal leaders and Congress can count on me to engage early, listen carefully, and be transparent. I am realistic about the challenges but optimistic about what we can achieve together. With strong federal, Tribal, and urban Indian health partners, outcomes will continue to improve."

Director Cruz's confirmation drew broad support from Indian Country. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) applauded the nomination and called for the Senate's swift confirmation, citing Cruz's advocacy for historic increases in IHS appropriations, his work mobilizing more than 70 Public Health Service officers to IHS facilities, and his efforts to reduce barriers for Tribal Nations developing culturally grounded health responses. The committee received more than 40 letters from Tribes and Tribal organizations in support of his confirmation.

NCUIH will continue to engage with Director Cruz and IHS on priorities including full and stable funding for IHS including urban Indian health, Medicaid parity for UIOs, and investments in Native behavioral health programs.

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