Ci3’s Hexacago Health Academy

Founded in 2012 by Melissa Gilliam MD, MPH, the Center for Interdisciplinary Inquiry and Innovation in Sexual in Reproductive Health (Ci3) at the University of Chicago is an award-winning research center that goes beyond traditional methods to address the social and structural determinants of adolescent reproductive health and well-being. Ci3 envisions a world in which all youth emerge into adulthood with agency over their bodies and futures. As such, we are committed to empowering young people, conducting innovative research, and uncovering opportunities for policy and systemic change. Ci3 houses three labs: the Game Changer Chicago Design Lab; the Transmedia Story Lab; and the Design Thinking Lab.

The Ci3 Game Changer Chicago Design Lab uses games as educational tools to improve adolescent health and well-being, encourage entry into STEM and health careers, and engage in critical social issues. For young people, games are a space for safe failure. Unlike the real world, games offer young people a chance to play out, rethink, and discuss their decisions with peers who are experiencing the exact same thing. By creating and playing games and sharing stories, youth build confidence and learn to recognize behaviors—in themselves and others—that can put them at risk.

Hexacago Health Academy is a NIH-funded, game-based, STEM and health program designed by Ci3 that engages high school students in learning about and addressing major health issues such as adolescent pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, urban planning and policy, through game play, interaction with educators, and mentoring. Each game-based intervention is created using the principles of human-centered design through collaboration with adolescents in the design process. Example games are included below:

- **Infection City** is a board game where players cooperate as a team of epidemiologists who try to contain a meningitis outbreak. Players build clinics and vaccinate populations while meningitis spreads.
- **Hearsay** is a storytelling card game about contraception, relationships, emotions, and social networks.
- **Smokestacks** is a resource management game that places players in the shoes of a tobacco executive whose goal is to make money in the face of customer deaths from tobacco related diseases.
- **Clinic Quest** is a trivia game where players take on the role of a health researcher who tries to collect data about six common sexually transmitted infections.
- **Babytown** is a resource management game in which players try to navigate high school with a twist. Each player has a chance to have a baby! Players try to balance GPA, money, and friends with their baby’s health and happiness.
- **Pipeline** is an asymmetrical game about the structures that feed into an increasingly violent city. Players take on a role as either the police commissioner, the mayor, or a drug dealer who all strive for your own personal victories even at the cost of the city’s health!

For more information on our games and projects, contact us at Ci3games@bsd.uchicago.edu.